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ESSAYS

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Truly Yours
George Bramley

ESSAYS

BY THE LATE

GEORGE BRIMLEY, M.A.

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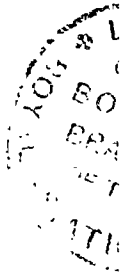

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TO THE REV.

FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE, M.A.

THE EDITOR INSCRIBES

THIS MEMORIAL OF THEIR COMMON FRIEND

PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

GEORGE BRIMLEY was born at Cambridge, December 29th, 1819.

From the age of eleven to sixteen he was at school at Totteridge. In October, 1838, he commenced residence as an undergraduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, where, in the year 1841, he was elected scholar. Even thus early his health began to fail. The cruel malady which ultimately proved fatal, had already fastened upon him. Hence he was compelled to relinquish his purpose of becoming a candidate for University Honours; hence also he failed in obtaining a College Fellowship. The Master and Seniors, however, shewed their sense of his merits by conferring upon him the honourable office of Librarian. From this time he continued to reside within the walls of the College, where, with ample leisure and opportunities for study, with the society of tried friends and in the neighbourhood of home, his life was made as happy as life can be without health.

For the last six years he contributed articles regularly to the *Spectator*, and occasionally also to *Fraser's Magazine*; an employment which suited him under the circumstances better than any other, as his bodily feebleness

forbade him to attempt any work of scope and difficulty corresponding to his mental powers. To this, his appointed task, he devoted himself with conscientious diligence. Papers found after his decease shew the pains he took to qualify himself for the responsible duty of a literary judge by careful study and elaborate analysis of the books he was about to criticise. Undertaken in this spirit, his work interested and amused him, while at the same time he was cheered and gratified by the attention and admiration which his articles received. In this way also he came to reckon among the number of his friends some of the most eminent literary men of their time. He made no enemies, because, though he never hesitated to state what he believed to be right, his own sensitive and affectionate nature guarded him from the wanton infliction of pain upon others. Seldom indeed did a petulant sarcasm or an inconsiderate jest fall from his pen. Belonging to no party and to no clique, he was eminently impartial.

With one exception—the paper on Tennyson's Poems which appeared in the *Cambridge Essays* for 1855—all Mr. Brimley's writings had been published anonymously, and after his decease his near relatives and intimate friends were unanimous in regretting that one who had devoted his whole life and his best gifts to literature should have left no adequate memorial of himself. Such a memorial we trust the present volume will be. This is

the primary object of its publication. The editors and proprietors* of the periodicals above mentioned have given to the scheme not merely their ready sanction, but also hearty sympathy and most kind assistance.

It was not without due deliberation that we determined upon the undertaking. We know that such republications are rarely successful, even when the contents have received—as these of course have not received—the final corrections of their author. Many an article, which on its first appearance all have agreed to call 'original' and 'brilliant,' seems flat and unprofitable when time has robbed its theories of their novelty and its illustrations of their piquancy. I have endeavoured to guard against such a result in the present case by selecting from the copious materials placed in my hands such papers as have a permanent and still present interest. For my own part a re-perusal of them has raised, instead of diminished, my previously high opinion of their merit. It may indeed be that many a passage recalling pleasant conversations and happy social hours acquires an additional interest in our eyes now that we shall talk with the writer no more,—an interest which no stranger can share; but, after all allowance is made on this score, I am

* One of these, a faithful and much loved friend, R. S. Rintoul, Esq., has just been called away beyond the reach of our thanks.

confident that the intrinsic merit of the volume will commend it to thinking readers, and acquit us, in their eyes, of undue partiality.

George Brimley's character is thus briefly described in a letter written soon after his death by one whom he was proud to call 'friend':

'I believe he was an unusually good man, whose goodness was not always prominent to the ordinary observer, but who was intrinsically faithful, true, brave, and affectionate . . . His death is really a loss to literature. He was certainly, as it appeared to me, one of the finest critics of the present day. We shall not soon meet with his like again. A. H.'

He died on the 29th of May, 1857.

He is buried at the new Cemetery at Cambridge. On the foot of the Cross that marks his resting-place is inscribed a text, of which the especial appropriateness and significance are known only to those who watched by his death-bed:

Mercy and Truth are met together.

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,
April 22, 1858.

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ESSAYS.

TENNYSON'S POEMS.

An essay upon a poet's writings may take one of two forms. It may either confine itself to an analysis of those writings with a view to discover the source of their power over the sympathies of men, or it may treat of the place the poet occupies in the literature of his time and country. The latter plan requires not only more knowledge and greater power of comprehensive survey on the part of the writer, but readers who are thoroughly acquainted both with the poet under review and all those with whom he is brought into comparison. This volume might doubtless find a sufficient number of readers thus qualified, among the class to which it is particularly addressed; and a comparison of Mr. Tennyson's genius and productions

with those of Byron, Shelley, Scott, Keats, and Wordsworth, would have abundant interest if it were executed with ability and judgment. The motives which, in spite of these reasons, have induced a preference for the former and easier plan, are twofold. In the first place the writer has no confidence in his own ability for a philosophical estimate of the essential characteristics of the poetry of the first and second quarters of the present century; he fears running into vague generalities and dogmatical assertions, where there is not space for testing his opinions by quotation and analysis of detail and construction. In the second place, his own experience leads him to think that analytical criticism of Mr. Tennyson's poems is likely to be interesting and serviceable to a large class of readers, though, of course, it can have little charm for persons who by talent and study are better qualified than he is to write such a criticism themselves. It has often happened to him to meet with persons of unquestioned talent and good taste, who profess themselves unable to understand why Mr. Tennyson is placed so high among poets as his admirers are inclined to place him; who say they find him obscure and affected,—the writer for a class rather than for a people. The object of this paper is to shew that we, who do admire him, have a reason for our faith; that we are not

actuated by blind preference for the man who echoes merely our own class feelings and opinions in forms that suit our particular tastes and modes of thought, —but that Mr. Tennyson is a poet of large compass, of profound insight, of finished skill. We find him possessing the clearest insight into our modern life, one who discerns its rich poetical resources, who tells us what we are and may be; how we can live free, joyous, and harmonious lives; what grand elements of thought, feeling, and action lie around us; what a field there is for the various activities fermenting within us. We do not call him a Shakspeare, or even a Chaucer; but what Shakspeare and Chaucer did for the ages they lived in, Mr. Tennyson is doing for our age, after his measure. He is shewing it to us as an age in which an Englishman may live a man's life, and be neither a mere man of business, nor a mere man of pleasure, but may find in his affections, studies, business, and relaxations scope for his spiritual faculties.

The main difficulty of the task has lain in the fact that the poems of Mr. Tennyson are never repetitions, in the great variety both of form and matter they exhibit. It has been impossible to do without special mention of a great number of poems, and the result is necessarily somewhat fragmentary and discursive. It turns out rather a commentary than an essay;

but its object will be answered, and the expectations of the writer amply satisfied, if it helps only a few persons to enjoy Tennyson more than they have hitherto done, and to understand better the ground of the claim that is made for him of belonging to the great poets. Little more has been attempted with the three longest poems, *The Princess*, *In Memoriam*, and *Maud*, than to place the reader in the true point of view, and examine certain prejudices against them which have obtained currency among us. Indeed, that was all that was absolutely necessary, as the hostile opinions have seldom been expressed unaccompanied by admiration of the beauties of detail in which these poems abound.

Mr. Tennyson published his first volume of poems in 1830,* when he was an undergraduate of Trinity College, Cambridge. It must always possess considerable interest for those who read and admire his maturer productions; but, with few exceptions, the poems it contains owe their main attraction to the fact that they are the earliest efforts of one who has gained a position of which they afforded no certain promise. Many of them are exquisitely musical—

* There is, we believe, an earlier volume of poems published by Alfred and Charles Tennyson, but we have never seen a copy; and the volume of 1830 is sufficiently juvenile for a starting-point.

great command of the resources of metre is manifest —and a richness of phraseology everywhere abounds. But substantial interest they certainly want, because they present no phenomena of nature or of human life with force and distinctness, tell no story, express no passion or clear thought, depict no person, thing, or scene that the mind can recognise for a reality. They are as far as possible from what might be expected of one who describes the poet as

> Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love,

and assigns to him the ministry of Wisdom, of whom he writes—

> No sword
> Of wrath her right arm hurled,
> But one poor poet's scroll, and with his word
> She shook the world.

So far from shaking the world, they are incapable of raising emotions in a solitary heart; so far from being instruments of wisdom, they scarcely reach the altitudes of ordinary sense. Take the first poem of the series, for example, *Claribel*. It is not quite certain what the precise feeling of the melody is,—whether it expresses a grief that, finding no consolation in its memories or hopes, is deepened by the sweet sights and sounds of the quiet churchyard; or a grief that finds in these a soothing influence.

Taking, however, the latter as the more probable theory, though no poem ought to admit of such a doubt, how singularly this treatment of the subject eliminates all that is most striking and affecting in it. If we mourn the early removal of one who was dear and lovely in her life, and whose memory lends a softening charm to the spot where her body lies, it is on her gentle and affectionate nature, on her grace and beauty, that the mind loves to linger in visiting her grave; it is these that make the place interesting, the recollection of these that consoles us who are deprived of her sweet presence. Or if the mind takes a loftier flight, it looks away from the past, and from the grave, to that bright world of spirits in which the beauty and excellence that were so soon blighted here reach their consummate flower, and bloom through eternity in the still garden of souls. But Mr. Tennyson says nothing of all this; his memory of the dead forms only a medium through which the living sights and sounds of nature round the grave are harmonized in tone with his own sadness, while the stillness and sweetness of the scene soothe his sorrow into a calm repose; the quiet beauty of the churchyard blends with the image of the lost one, and he thinks of her hereafter in unutterable peace, amid the songs of birds, the voice of the solemn oak-tree, the slow regular changes

from morn to noon, from noon to midnight. This is to treat human life from its least impressive point of view; to feel its sorrows and consolations in their least substantial and abiding power. It is, however, a real point of view; and both sorrow and consolation will sometimes assume this form spontaneously, though seldom so completely to the exclusion of more direct and powerful considerations as in the poem of *Claribel*.

The poems inscribed with the names of women would furnish other examples of this perverse, unreal treatment of subjects capable of interesting the sympathies. There is in none of them any presentation of those distinct traits by which we recognise human beings, no action or speech, no description of mind, person, or history, but a series of epithets and similes which convey nothing, because we have not the image of the thing which they are intended to illustrate. Other poems are uninteresting from their subjects, such as *The Merman, The Mermaid, The Sea Fairies, The Kraken, The Dying Swan*, &c. No music of verse, no pictorial power, will enable a reader to care for such creatures of the fancy; otherwise, both music and pictorial power are there. How clear the painting is here—

> Slow sailed the weary mariners, and saw
> Between the green brink and the running foam,

White limbs unrobèd in a chrystal air,
Sweet faces, rounded arms, and bosoms prest
To little harps of gold.

How musical and vivid—

There would be neither moon nor star,
But the wave would make music above us afar;
Low thunder and light, in the magic night,
Neither moon nor star.

Though such subjects would seem wilfully chosen to avoid reality and human interest, they shew throughout great power of painting scenery, and of associating it with the feelings of animated beings; and are in fact pictures of peculiar character, in which the objects grouped and the qualities attributed to them are viewed through the medium of the beings associated with the scene. Thus they become dramatically descriptive, and display the germ of a principle of landscape painting which Mr. Tennyson has in his later poems brought to great perfection, and largely employed. The principle consists in a combination of landscape and figures in which the landscape is not merely background to the figures, or the figures animated objects in the landscape, but the two are dynamically related, so that the landscape is described as seen and felt by the persons of the scene, under the influence of some emotion which selects objects congenial to its own moods, and modifies their

generic appearances,—if the word *generic* may be used to express the appearance objects present to a mind in its ordinary, unexcited state. And thus we get a landscape which is at once ideal and real —a collection of actual images of external nature, grouped and coloured by a dominant idea; and the whole composition derives from this principle a harmony and a force of expression which, whether the principal aim be landscape-painting or the delineation of human emotion, produce that dramatic unity demanded in works of art. Employed as the principle is in this early volume upon scenery that is strange and upon emotions that are not human, it yet shews its power of producing a picture throughout harmoniously conceived, and evidences a capacity for concentration that only needs substantially interesting material to work upon.

The poem which, better than any other in the first series, exhibits the power of concentrating the imagination upon the subject, to the exclusion of an extraneous and discordant train of thought, and at the same time furnishes an admirable instance of dramatic landscape-painting, or passion reflecting itself on landscape, is *Mariana*. As the physiologists tell us that the organs of the higher animals are found in an undeveloped state in those of lower type, we may look upon this poem as a foreshadowing of a kind of poetry

that in the later volumes will be found in full perfection. In *Mariana* the landscape details are presented with the minute distinctness with which they would strike upon the morbid sensibility of a woman abandoned to lonely misery, whose attention is distracted by no cares, pleasures, or satisfied affections. To the painter in search of the picturesque, or a happy observer seeing the sunny side of everything, or a utilitarian looking for the productive resources of the scene, the whole aspect of the fen scenery would be totally different. But selected, grouped, and qualified by epithets, as the natural objects of the landscape are in the poem, they tell of the years of pain and weariness associated with them in the mind of the wretched Mariana, and produce an intense impression of hopeless suffering, which no other treatment of the single figure could have produced. The minute enumeration of detail would be a fault in a mere landscape artist, whose object was to describe a natural scene. It is an excellence here, because no other means could so forcibly mark the isolation, the morbid sensitiveness, and the mind vacant of all but misery; because, used thus, it becomes eminently dramatic,—the landscape expresses the passion of the mind which contemplates it, and the passion gives unity and moral interest to the landscape. There is not, throughout the poem, a single epithet which belongs

to the objects irrespective of the story with which the scene is associated, or a single detail introduced which does not aid the general impression of the poem. They mark either the pain with which Mariana looks at things, or the long neglect to which she has been abandoned, or some peculiarity of time and place which marks the morbid minuteness of her attention to objects. If the moss is *blackened,* the flower-pots *thickly crusted,* the nails *rusted,* the sheds *broken,* the latch *clinking,* the thatch *weeded and worn,* not one of these epithets but tells of long neglect, and prolongs the key-note of *sad and strange* loneliness. If

> She could not look on the *sweet* heaven,
> Either at morn or eventide,—

this epithet, startling at first from its apparent intrusion of the frame of mind in which the heaven is *sweet,* heightens the impression of that tear-blinded misery to which the light in its softest mildness is intolerable. Even at night, when the sky is enveloped in 'thickest dark,' when the flats are 'glooming,' she can only glance across the casement window. Her sleep is broken by sounds that painfully recal the desolate scene of daylight; her dreams are forlorn, and stamped with the hopeless monotony of her lot; and she wakes to shudder in a cold, windy, cheerless morn. The moat that surrounds

her prison is no bright sparkling stream; clustered marsh mosses creep over its blackened and sleeping waters, stifling with their loathsome death in life the most active and joyous of nature's visible powers, and giving to the captive a striking emblem of her own choked and stagnant existence. The poplar hard by is never in repose, shaking like a sick man in a fever; for leagues round spreads the 'level waste, the rounding grey,' with no object, no variety, to interest the attention. What moves, moves always, harassing the nerves,—what is at rest seems dead, striking cold the heart. It is needless to pursue this analysis throughout a poem so familiar. The effect is felt by the reader with hardly a consciousness of the skill of the writer, or of the intense dramatic concentration implied in such employment of language. If expression were the highest aim of poetry, *Mariana in the Moated Grange* must be counted among the most perfect of poems, in spite of an occasional weakness of phrase. But almost perfect as the execution is, the subject is presented too purely as a picture of hopeless, unrelieved suffering, to deserve the name of a great poem. The suffering is, so to speak, distinct and individual, but the woman who suffers is vague and indistinct; we have no interest in her, because we know nothing about her story or herself in detail; she is not a

wronged and deserted woman, but an abstract generalization of wronged and deserted womanhood; all the individuality is bestowed upon the landscape in which she is placed. This again, as was said of *Claribel*, is to view human life from its least affecting and impressive side.

The task that lies before us will not allow us to dwell longer on the poems of the first volume. Taken as a whole, they indicate that Mr. Tennyson set out with the determination to be no copyist, and to abstain from setting to verse the mere personal emotions of his own actual life. Even the few poems that did express personal emotion he has excluded from his collected edition.

> To hold converse with all forms
> Of the manysided mind,—

to present not feelings, but the objects which excite feelings, must have been very distinctly his aim at this period. And it is worth noticing, that though he lived at this time in the centre of the most distinguished young men of his University, his poems present but faint evidence of this. He seems to have deliberately abstained from any attempt to paint the actual human life about him, or to give a poetical form to such impressions of real life as he might have obtained from reading. No one who knows the men with whom he lived, or who has read his

later poems, can doubt that the sympathies with human emotion, the noble views of human character and destiny, that distinguish his mature poems, must have then existed in the man; and we must therefore infer that he did not feel his mastery over the instruments of his art sufficient to justify him in delineating human life. His knowledge of the modes in which emotion and character manifest themselves, must have appeared to him too imperfect to attempt their exhibition in rhythmical forms—these forms being no mere conventional arrangement of words to please the ear, but the expression of the delight of the poet at the beauty and completeness of the pictures vividly present to his imagination; and in their highest symbolic value, representing the poet's insight into the moral meaning of life, and his vision of a perfect order and harmony in the universe,—of the triumph of good over evil. To attain skill in the employment of rhythmical forms,—to sing nobly and naturally, to form a style capable of musically expressing his ideas, as ripening intellect and enlarged experience should supply him with ideas demanding musical expression, may be set down as the aim, more or less conscious, of this first poetical series. Probably to the avoidance of subjects beyond his powers, to the careful elaboration of his style, the world may be indebted for the perfection of his

later poems. Had he begun with *Balder* or *Festus*, he would not have afterwards produced *The Morte d'Arthur*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, *Locksley Hall*, and *In Memoriam*. *Mariana in the Moated Grange* marks the highest point of the first flight, and in that the power of the artist is shewn in the complete presentation of a limited and peculiar view of the subject, rather than in the ethical or poetical value of the conception.

Mr. Tennyson's second volume bears the date of 1833. It contains some poems which their author has not thought worthy of preservation, and some others which take their place among his collected poems, considerably altered. But characterised as a whole, in comparison with the first volume, it marks a surprising advance, both in conception and execution. *Mariana*, and perhaps *Recollections of the Arabian Nights*, are the only poems of the first series that would have had a chance of being remembered for their own merits, and they are both admirably executed rather than interesting. But in the second volume, *The Miller's Daughter*, *Œnone*, *The Palace of Art*, *The May Queen*, and *The Lotos Eaters* would, even in their original forms, have been enduring memorials of a rare poetic faculty. In *The Miller's Daughter* and *The May Queen* the affections of our every-day life, and the scenery with which they

associate themselves, become for the first time the subject of Mr. Tennyson's art; and we appreciate the important principle of treating landscape as dynamically related to emotion when we see it applied to feelings which powerfully affect us, and with whose action we are sufficiently familiar to sympathise. In the two *Marianas* this principle is carried thoroughly out, but under conditions which interfere with our hearty enjoyment of the poems. Partly, no doubt, the contemplation of unmixed pain that serves no disciplinal aim is painful, however exquisitely it may be delineated, and hardly consistent with the delight we expect from every work of art; but the absence from both the *Marianas* of any but the faintest traces of the previous story, and of any traits of individual character, has more to do with this want of popular interest. They are, as was said before, not women whose history and character we can realise sufficiently to care about them, but abstract types; and the consequence of this is, that the landscape element predominates too much. Instead of serving simply to reflect and render legible the misery of the women, it becomes itself the principal object, and the women are lost in its details. Besides, we feel that no human life could possibly endure a loneliness and wretchedness so unmixed as are depicted, and that these pictures are not true

because they leave out elements essential to the real drama, which they present in part. But in *The Miller's Daughter* there is a story which tells the leading incidents of a life,—there are real persons presented, with their distinguishing traits; and the scenery, though intimately blended with the life, and entering as an indispensable element in the story, because indissolubly connected with the memories of the speaker, becomes subordinate, and no longer overrides the human interest. And it is only in this way, when emotion is presented in connexion with the incidents out of which it rises, and with the persons who experience it, and when the scenery is made to reflect, not simple emotion, but the emotion of distinct persons, that an interesting poem can be written, and the affections of the reader sincerely touched. So long as the emotion is presented without a distinct conception of the person experiencing it, and the cause why, and the scenery is presented through the medium of this abstract emotion, as it may be called, the skill of the artist may be admired, but he will not be a popular poet; and a poet who does not write at the heart of a people is no poet at all. *The Miller's Daughter* and *The May Queen* at once established Mr. Tennyson's capacity for becoming a popular poet, and made him one within a limited circle. Their charm

consists in the real interest of lives moved by the simplest affections and the simplest enjoyments, and in the skill with which these lives are presented as complete dramas, though each poem is extended in time only through an ordinary conversation. It is in each case a life reviewed by the speaker under the emotion that belongs to a particular moment; and the golden calm that rests upon the one, and the sweet innocence that shines through the other, belong naturally to the circumstances under which the reminiscences are uttered. Nothing of truth is sacrificed to ideality, but such ideality as gives both unity of colouring throughout, and guides the selection of details, is the true result of the emotion of each speaker. Thus the charm of completeness, which is the aim of narrative, is united with the power over the sympathies possessed by the spontaneous outpouring of feeling; and a lyrical flow of emotion is made to hold in solution, as it were, the constituents of a drama or a novel.

But it must not be supposed, because these two poems have been contrasted with the *Marianas* and shewn to have more power over the affections, more of the elements necessary to popularity, that the *Marianas* are failures of the poet to work out his own intentions. Neither *Mariana* professes to be a *tale* of human passion, with its alternations of joy

and sorrow. Had the excitement of pity, or any mere emotion, been the object of the poet, we must think him obtuse not to know that his mode of presenting the tale would but feebly answer his purpose. We see by *The Miller's Daughter* and the *May Queen* that he can move us to tears, or fill us with serene delight, if such were his object. But if we revert to the second Mariana, transported to an Italian landscape, we see her as in a picture, lovely in her lonely wretchedness; we see the landscape round her ministering torture to her heart and senses, that long for quiet sound and shadow. We go with her in her dream to her breezy mountain home,—we wake with her to the torturing glare of the blinding noon-day heat,—we breathe with her as she leans at evening on her balcony, while Hesper sheds divine solace on her soul, and coolness and soft distant sounds bring a semblance of repose. In that dream of home and of the past, in the recurrence of a kind of comfort in the cool evening, in her prayer to the Madonna, and even in the distinct picture of her beauty, we recognise the superiority to the first Mariana, and the growth of Mr. Tennyson's genius. But one touch of grief that should connect itself with a definite incident, or a person brought clearly before the mind, would excite more pity, more affection to her, and more indignation against her false

lover. She would walk out of her frame, and become a woman with a history and with relations to the common world, and our emotional sympathies would at once flow forth towards her. At present it is the perceptive faculties that are occupied with her, which are thronged with images making up a picture. No doubt the picture is intelligible enough for the imagination of the reader to supply the history without difficulty in its general character, but the mind has no strong grasp of what is apprehended only in its general character; and the poem, as it stands before us, remains a beautiful picture, rather than an affecting love story, and this though it is the crisis of a thousand affecting love stories. If Mr. Tennyson had chosen to stamp that individuality of character and incident which gives its charm to life, and to the fiction which aims at presenting real life, we have evidence that he could, at this time, have done it. Instead of that he tells us no more of his Italian Mariana than if she were painted for us in a picture by Millais, except that the poem gives us changes of time and scenery as a compensation for that vividness of presentation denied to words. It is the development from the painter to the poet,—from the man who can make beautiful pictures to the man who can present human life, with all its activities of noble thought and pure

affection, and, in presenting it, can justify its being to the heart and reason, that marks Mr. Tennyson's poetic course.

But through the greater portion of the second volume the painter predominates. We have no poems to place by the side of *The Miller's Daughter* and *The May Queen*. *The Lady of Shalott*, founded on an incident in *King Arthur*, is so treated as to eliminate all the human interest of the original story, and the process gives us a being whose existence passes without emotion, without changes, without intelligible motive for living on, without hope or fear here or hereafter. Nothing remains but the faint shadow of humanity, from which life, and motion, and substance have departed. All this price to gain perfect serenity, and some new phase of being for the reflective faculty to make what it can of,—perhaps to cause our human heart to beat the stronger for reaction! Considered merely as a picture *The Lady of Shalott* has a serene beauty, and clear landscape features, that only make one more angry that so much skill in presenting objects should be employed upon a subject that can only amuse the imagination.

The poem to which, in subsequent editions, the name of *Fatima* is given, cannot be charged with want of passion; but, like the *Marianas*, it leaves

the reader too much to supply in the way of story and person. It would be doing it injustice to call it the concentrated essence of Byron's Gulnares, Zuleikas, *et id genus omne;* for Byron never reached any point near this 'withering might' of love. But as it stands, it is too fragmentary,—a mere study, though so finished as to make one long for the poem which should have developed it. One would think that Mr. Tennyson must have been smitten with a determinate aversion to popularity, and, at the same time, have resolved to shew what a power of intense passionate expression he was master of, when he left such a poem without beginning, middle, or end. Perhaps, however, in his opinion, this overmastering Eastern passion, that, like a fever, dries up and exhausts mind and body, has no phases capable of forming into a story or drama. It may be the very essence of this type of love that it should not rise by degrees, by half-confidences, by all the pleasant stages of Western love, but burst forth at once into full consciousness, and know no changes but the fiercest extremes of tenderness and exhaustion. In that case, its true poetic expression would be given in the passionate utterance of desire strained to agony; and, be that as it may, the effect of such passion, in morbidly heightening the nervous sensibility, and giving a painful intensity to all impressions on the

senses, is indicated with marvellous force of imagination, and rendered into language and rhythm which pour forth like a flood of lava from a volcano in eruption.

The pre-eminence of the painter reappears in *Œnone*. If the poet's object had been to tell a moving story of love, and wrong, and grief, he would not have chosen for his heroine a mythological nymph, nor have thrown his incidents back to the siege of Troy, and among beings whose existence is no longer believed in. As little is his purpose, in treating Greek mythology, akin to Shelley's, who clothes in its forms a sentimental nature-philosophy, and a pantheistical worship. *Œnone* is more akin in spirit to *Endymion* and *Hyperion;* but its verse is more majestic, and its luxuriant pictorial richness more controlled by definite conception, more articulated by fine drawing, than even the latter and greater of Keats's two poems. Gorgeous mountain and figure painting stand here as the predominant aim as clearly as in any picture by Titian or Turner; only poetry will not lose her prerogative of speech, and will paint her mountains and her figures in a medium of passion to which the artist upon canvas vainly aspires. Round Ida and its valleys, round Troas and its windy citadel, Œnone can pour the enchantment of her memories of love and grief. To

her can the naked goddesses—painted as Rubens could not paint them,—life, motion, and floating lights,—utter celestial music, and grand thoughts ally themselves with splendid pictures. If the wish will force its way, that Greek mythology might be left at peace in its tomb, and that a harp so strung to passion and to thought should pour the spell of its music upon a theme in which the imagination should harmonise and interpret the life of the men and women about us, we can but answer, that the deeper music will yet beat itself out,—that this is but prelude, shewing the artist's power and perfecting his hand.

The Lotos Eaters carries Tennyson's tendency to pure æstheticism to an extreme point. It is picture and music, and nothing more. The writer did not suppose he was writing *Hamlet*, or solving 'the riddle of the painful earth.' Nor must we go to the work with that demand upon it. If music and picture—the feelings of imaginary beings, in a pure region of imagination, perfectly presented in rhythmical language that takes the formative impulse of the feeling, as falling water does of the forces that draw it into a flashing curve—have no charm for any mind, that mind can find no interest in *The Lotos Eaters*. To attempt to treat it as an allegory, which figures forth the tendency to abandon the

battle of life, to retire from a fruitless, ever-renewed struggle,—to read it as we should read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and look out for facts of actual experience which answer to its images, is as monstrous and perverse as it would be to test a proposition of geometry by its rhythm and imagery. A mood of feeling, of course, it represents, and feeling dependent on, and directed to distinct objects,—in this latter respect, alone, differing from music. We may, of course, too, apply the mood of feeling thus depicted to the real events of life, and translate it into the actual language of men under the influence of 'mild-eyed melancholy.' So we might with a sonata of Beethoven's,—but the application is ours, and not the composer's; and if we attempt to limit the composer to our interpretation, rather than give ourselves up to his free inspiration from a purely musical impulse, all we get by it is, generally, a very poor verbal poem, instead of a noble work that does not, however, belong to the region of articulate speech. It is, perhaps, because the companion poem of the *Hesperides* does not even represent a mood of feeling, as well as because it is far less perfect in execution, that it has been left out of succeeding editions.

It may be suggested that *The Palace of Art* contradicts what has been said of Mr. Tennyson's

tendency to paint pictures rather than to dramatise life and its emotions. And had the conception of the poem been adequately worked out, it would have reached the highest point of view from which life can be surveyed. The poet himself declares it to be an allegory, and, therefore, to have an interest mainly ethical, to which, by the nature of the case, all mere pictorial or musical beauty is to be subordinate. But how has the conception been carried out? Has the poet's intention been adequately realised, or has the fully developed pictorial and rhythmical talent been too much for his less highly developed dramatic and philosophic power? No one can read the poem and fail to see that only half his intention has been completed; and that, in spite of himself, the pictorial and musical element has prevailed over the moral and philosophic aim. With the site, construction, and furniture of *The Soul's Palace*, he must be a fastidious critic who would not be highly delighted,—the finest ideal Strawberry Hill that ever poet's brain conceived. With the truth of the lesson, too, no moralist can quarrel. It is profoundly true that a mere artistic enjoyment of the universe will make no great soul permanently happy. To make the poem perfect, the process of the soul's growing discontent with, and final disgust at, the beautiful objects with which it has surounded

itself, should have been displayed and accounted for, since, as mere statement, it is a truism. If a real man has come to the conclusion that his happiness consists in perfect isolation from his fellow-creatures in act and sympathy, in letting the world and his fellow-men enter his thoughts solely as pictures to be enjoyed for their variety, one of two things happens to him,—either that his pictures cease to amuse him when his appetite for novelty is worn out, or arouse his sympathies for the men and women whose lives and thoughts they shadow forth,—his awe and adoration of the source of all this wondrous activity,—his desire to understand the meaning and purpose of it all. Mere variety that does not succeed in exciting these feelings soon wearies; for the infinite element in life is not the variety of things by which we are acted on, but the unfathomable personality of our own being; and it is just this personality which the soul in the poem is doing all he can to quench in himself. He is trying to live by the outward things about him, and by the enjoyment they afford to his intellect; while he ignores that relation to God and to his fellow-beings, in the consciousness and acknowledgment of which spiritual life consists. When, then, his beautiful objects pall upon him, as his intellectual and perceptive craving is wearied, they become dead things, and loathsome

in his eyes; a disgust at his life seizes him, while he shrinks in horror from the prospective isolation of death. The soul that has not exercised itself in feelings which grow by what they feed on must experience inconceivable horror at the decay of its intellectual and perceptive activities, unless it contemplates annihilation. But the soul in *The Palace* has reasoned itself into a conviction of immortality, and the pride which in its case lay at the bottom of that conviction, becomes its own scourge. For immortality becomes blank endless isolation, not merely from sympathies, but from objects of interest,—one never-ceasing death in life. Scorn of himself is born of this gloom and misery—vain attempts to rally by recalling memories of past strength and enjoyment soon give way to fixed despair. Feeling himself wretched, the desire of pity comes upon him, and the fellow-feeling comes with the sense of the need of fellow-feeling. He sees that the wretched people whom he had despised were necessary to him, —he casts away his proud seclusion, abandons his life of intellect and enjoyment to mourn and work with the herd, if so be he may obtain pardon for his inhuman sin.

Something of this process is no doubt described in the poem, but not with sufficient fulness or clearness. As the mere statement of the law that the

soul cannot live in isolation is a truism, the chief interest of the poem should have been thrown upon the development of the law in operation; the reader should have been made to go along with the soul in its exultation, in its first start of doubtful suspicion, in its gradual perception of the horrors of its condition, in its slow but sure realisation of its own wretchedness, in its prostration of self-abhorrence and remorse. A nobler allegory could not be conceived, or one more fitted to the age, and to the highest intellects of all ages. But it fails just where it ought to have been strongest; and what we have is a series of magnificent pictures in magnificent verse, followed, indeed, by a statement of the moral in very noble stanzas, but by no adequate dramatic presentation of the mode in which the great law of humanity works out its processes in the soul. What is subordinate in object not only fills more space—that were unimportant—but in force of treatment, in interest, the furniture of *The Palace* quite surpasses the vindication of the moral law. Indeed, it has been profanely remarked that the poem resembles a *catalogue raisonnée*, richly illuminated, of the effects of a soul compelled for a time to quit its mansion, and wishing to dispose of its furniture by auction. Perhaps it would have been impossible adequately to impress the moral without descending altogether

from the heights of allegory, and presenting a drama of actual human experience. The universal law would have been best shewn in a particular case, and in connexion with an intelligible human life. But even under the conditions of the allegory more emphasis might and ought to have been given to the main end and purpose of the poem, and less, comparatively, to its machinery. Though many alterations have been made in subsequent editions, this main defect of structure has never been remedied.

With the publication of the Third Series, in 1842, Mr. Tennyson appears distinctly as the poet of his own age. His apprenticeship is over, his mastery over the instruments of his art is complete, and he employs it in either presenting the life of his contemporaries, the thoughts, incidents, and emotions of the nineteenth century in England, or in treating legend and history with reference to the moral and intellectual sympathies now active amongst us. In other words, he no longer writes poems for us that charm by their pictorial and rhythmical beauty, but, presenting modes of existence and feeling which are either altogether inhuman or imperfectly human, excite none of the interest that belongs to what reflects and interprets our own lives. Mermen, mermaids, sea fairies, Ladies of Shalott, Lotos Eaters, disappear from the scene; Adelines, Margarets, Elea-

nores, no longer come as abstract types of character without speech, story, or personal relations, figured forth in abundance of similes but with none of the traits by which the mind apprehends individual men and women; Grecian nymphs no longer pour out their loves and griefs to their mother earth, and Grecian goddesses no longer interfere in the affairs of mortals, and shed the lustre of celestial presences on the mountain side. That in which we cannot believe, either ceases to be treated at all, or is treated as symbol and picture of what we know to be profoundly real. So far is this change from necessitating any narrowing of the poet's range of subjects, that legendary history, fairy fiction, Greek poetry, and trees endowed with human speech, blend in the procession with Egyptian fanatics, rapt nuns, English ladies, peasant girls, artists, lawyers, farmers,—in fact, a tolerably complete representation of the miscellaneous public of the present day; while the forms vary from epic fragments to the homeliest dialogue, —from the simplest utterance of emotion in a song to the highest lyrical allegory of a terrible and profound law of life. The poet looks upon a larger field than before, and what he looked on before he now sees with a more penetrating eye, a mind that apprehends wider and deeper relations. He paints more brilliantly and forcibly than ever, but his pictures

speak to the heart and spirit as well as to the eye; his music is even richer and more charming in its melody, but it moves henceforth fraught with the feelings and ideas by which men and nations work out the divine purposes of their being. In some poems the artistic beauty seems given more for its own sake than for any moral that lies in the story, any ulterior meaning which it unfolds; but the noble pictures which the actions and persons of human beings furnish are themselves Moral and Interpretation; and in no poems more than in those which simply present the splendour and beauty of humanity, and of the material universe in which humanity works its work, does the poet fulfil his highest function.

The first poem in the Third Series is called *The Epic*, and contains a fragment on the death of King Arthur, read to the party assembled in a country-house at Christmas. Set thus amidst the fireside talk of Christmas Eve, *Morte d'Arthur* ceases to be a fragment of animated and picturesque epic story, and becomes the answer of a Christian poet to the querulous lamentation of the Christian ritualist and dogmatist over the decay of faith. The noble humanity and piety that shone in chivalry are not dead, he tells us, with King Arthur, though

> The sequel of to-day unsolders all
> The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
> Whereof this world holds record.

Excalibur, the mystic sword which Arthur wielded so long and so well, vanishes with him from the world, but the heavenly weapons wherewith men fight the good fight are still bestowed upon the heroes of the successive ages, differing in form and temper, but effective for the various work, and fitted to the hands that are to wield them. Not only has each age its new work to do, its new instruments and new men to do it, as matter of historical fact, but it must be so,—

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

The Arthur of the round-table is gone to fable-land; but the desire and hope that gave birth to the legends of chivalry yet live,—the dim prophecy that he will one day return and rule over Britain is ever accomplishing itself. What mean those Christmas bells that tell us yearly Christ is born? Do they lie? No! they blend with all noble legends that speak of man's great deeds, of his vaster aspirations, of his yet unaccomplished hopes. They remind us of the prophecy to which fact is tending, of the ideal after which the real is striving. To him whose heart is hopeful and brave, who will not be the slave of formulas, 'Arthur is come again, and cannot die,' is the burden of the world's song; 'Come

again, and thrice as fair,' is heard in every change by which the thoughts of men are widened and their hearts enlarged; 'Come with all good things, and war shall be no more,' the strain that echoes clear in the distance, and most clear when the church bells ring in the Christmas morn. *Morte d'Arthur* is no mere story out of an old book, refurbished with modern ornaments, but a song of hope, a prophecy of the final triumph of good. Mr. Tennyson has, indeed, lavished upon the story all the resources of a genius eminently pictorial, and trained to complete mastery over language and metre. He might unquestionably have silenced the parson in a more simple and direct fashion, by which he would not only have deprived us of a noble piece of painting, but have missed a poetic and profoundly true method of looking at national legends. The poem justifies itself, by its finished excellence, as a work of art, but it is spiritualised and raised above merely pictorial and dramatic beauty by its setting, and the poet's nineteenth-century point of view.

Mr. Tennyson makes the supposed author, Everard Hall, talk of his fragment as

> Faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth,—
> Mere chaff and draff, much better burnt.

They are rather Virgilian than Homeric echoes; elaborate and stately, not *naïve* and eager to tell

their story; rich in pictorial detail; carefully studied; conscious of their own art; more anxious for beauty of workmanship than interest of action. But since John Dryden died, no English poet has written verse so noble, so sonorous, of such sustained majesty and might; no English poet has brought pictures so clear and splendid before the eye by the power of single epithets and phrases; and Dryden himself never wrote a poem so free from careless lines, unmeaning words, and conventional epithets. The fragment bursts upon us like the blended blast and wail of the trumpets of pursuing and retreating hosts: a whole day's alternate victory and defeat, a series of single combats, the death of the leaders one by one, the drawing off of the armies at sunset, King Arthur alone and wounded on the field, the coming on of night and the rising of the moon, the approach of King Arthur's last captain to bear him to a place of shelter, are pictured to the imagination in the few vigorous lines that commence the poem:

> So all day long the noise of battle rolled
> Among the mountains by the winter sea;
> Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
> Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their Lord,
> King Arthur; then, because his wound was deep,
> The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
> Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
> And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,

> A broken chancel with a broken cross,
> That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
> On one side lay the ocean, and on one
> Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

That phrase, 'a great water,' has probably often been ridiculed as affected phraseology for 'a great lake'; but it is an instance of the intense presentative power of Mr. Tennyson's genius. It precisely marks the appearance of a large lake outspread and taken in at one glance from a high ground. Had 'a great lake' been substituted for it, the phrase would have needed to be translated by the mind into water of a certain shape and size, before the picture was realised by the imagination. 'A great *lake*' is, in fact, one degree removed from the sensuous to the logical,—from the individual appearance to the generic name, and is therefore less poetic and pictorial.

With what distinctness, with what force and conciseness of language, is the whole scene of the churchyard, with its associations, brought before the mind; its ancestral relics, the ruins of the chapel, the piercing cold of the night-wind edged with sea-salt, the sharp rocks down which the path to the lake descends:

> So saying, from the ruined shrine he stept,
> And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,

> Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
> Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
> Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down,
> By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
> Came on the shining levels of the lake.

The classical *æquora* may have suggested the 'shining *levels*'; but there is a deeper reason for the change of phrase, for the 'great water,' as seen from the high ground, becomes a series of flashing surfaces when Sir Bedivere looks along it from its margin.

This pictorial reality is kept up through the poem. Excalibur does not merely sparkle in the moonlight with its jewelled hilt, but

> The winter moon,
> Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, *ran forth*
> *And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt.*

Sir Bedivere does not doubt whether he shall throw the sword, but stands

> This way and that, dividing the swift mind,
> In act to throw.

None the worse a phrase for recalling the Virgilian 'Atque animum nunc huc celerem nunc dividit illuc.' The 'many-knotted waterflags' are not brought in simply to hide Excalibur, they must add their life to the picture, and

> Whistle stiff and dry about the marge.

Everywhere the phenomenon is presented with the utmost vividness and truth of appearance, with the

utmost fulness of sense-impressing qualities; sensuous concrete language takes the place of our common speech, abounding in logical generalisations and names of classes. The mind is kept awake and in full activity by the presence of those realities which are smothered and hidden by the conventional symbols through which ordinary narrative is carried on. The most delicate distinctions of phenomena are noted that serve as an aid to our complete realisation of the scene. Sir Bedivere hears

> The ripple *washing in the reeds*,

and

> The wild water *lapping on the crags;*

the two phrases marking exactly the difference of sound produced by water swelling up against a permeable or impermeable barrier.

How thoroughly Shakspearian is King Arthur's lament,

> Woe is me!
> Authority forgets a dying king,
> Laid widowed of the power in his eye
> That bowed the will,

where the personification assists the imagination without distressing the understanding, as when dwelt upon and expanded in detail; deepening the impressiveness of the sentiment by giving along with a true thought a grand picture,—just such a passing flash of impassioned rhetoric as would become the

highest oratory, and thrill through the hearts of a great assembly.

In the description of Sir Bedivere's last and successful attempt to throw the sword into the lake, every word tells of rapid, agitated, determined action, refusing to dally with the temptation that had twice overcome him:

> Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran
> And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
> Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword
> And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
> Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
> And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
> Shot like a streamer of the northern morn
> Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
> By night, with noises of the northern sea.
> So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur.

A series of brilliant effects is hit off in those two words, 'made lightnings.' 'Whirl'd in an arch,' is a splendid instance of sound answering to sense, which the older critics made so much of; the additional syllable which breaks the measure, and necessitates an increased rapidity of utterance, seeming to express to the ear the rush of the sword up its parabolic curve. And with what lavish richness of presentative power is the boreal aurora, the collision, the crash, and the thunder of the meeting icebergs, brought before the eye. An inferior artist would

have shouted through a page, and emptied a whole pallet of colour, without any result but interrupting his narrative, where Tennyson in three lines strikingly illustrates the fact he has to tell,—associates it impressively with one of nature's grandest phenomena, and gives a complete picture of this phenomenon besides.

How dramatic and striking is King Arthur's sudden exclamation on Sir Bedivere's return—

> Now see I by thine eyes that this is done;

how wonderfully true of a dying man, the

> Looking wistfully, with wide blue eye,
> As in a picture;

how pictorial and minutely attentive to the facts of appearance—

> But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
> Clothed with his breath, and looking as he walked
> Larger than human on the frozen hills;

how rapid and eager the haste of movement in reply to the King's 'Quick, quick!'—

> He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
> Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
> Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
> And barren chasms, and all to left and right
> The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
> His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
> Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels;

do we not seem to burst from the narrow steep path down the ravine, whose tall precipitous sides hide the sky and the broad landscape from sight, and come out in a moment upon

> The level lake
> And the long glories of the winter moon?

In some over-fastidious moods, one might be inclined to charge

> A cry that *shivered* to the *tingling* stars,

with a touch of that exaggeration which belongs to the 'spasmodic school'; but the cry comes from a company of spirits, amid mountains whose natural power of echo is heightened by the silence of night, the clearness of the winter air, and the hardening effect of frost. Such a cry at such a time, and in such a place, would thrill from rock to rock, from summit to summit, till it seemed to pierce the sky in a hurtling storm of multitudinous arrowy sounds, and die away in infinitely distant pulsations among the stars. In the following lines, where the agony of lamentation is compared to

> A wind that shrills
> All night in a waste land, *where no one comes,*
> *Or hath come since the making of the world,*—

the passage italicised may seem at first to add nothing to the force of the comparison, as the shrillness of the wind would not be greater in an uninhabited

place than anywhere else in open ground. But the mournfulness of the feeling a man would experience in such a place, from the sense of utter isolation and sterility, is blended with the naturally sad wail of the wind over a wide waste, and the addition thus becomes no mere completion of a thought of which only part is wanted for the illustration—though that were allowable enough, according to ordinary poetic usage—but gives a heightening of sentiment without which the illustration itself would be incomplete and less impressive.

Magnificent similes do not make poetry, but they are among its most effective means of filling the mind of the reader with the actual grandeur and pathos of the particular scene presented. Where the poet seizes not upon some mere superficial resemblance that draws the fancy between two objects essentially different in the general feeling they excite, but brings in a phenomenon of nature which excites feelings analogous to those belonging to the event or scene he is narrating, the use of simile and figure not only enables him to avoid encumbering his narrative by detail and epithet, and general terms otherwise necessary to bring his object before the mind, but associates that object at once and spontaneously with the feelings belonging to the illustrating phenomenon—an effect which could not be

produced apart from this device except by long drawn-out reflections. Simile and figure may be regarded as a natural short-hand, which substitutes well-known things for the unknown qualities of whatever has to be described, and which therefore gives the general effect of the things to be described without necessitating the task of minute description. This is exactly the reverse of the use made of these forms of speech by the man of wit, who intentionally selects for his illustration some merely accidental and often merely verbal resemblance between two things essentially different in themselves and in the feelings they excite. But the poet, in his impassioned or serious moods, seizes not on resemblances but true analogies; and they at once adorn his poetry with impressive pictures, and convey his meaning with force and brevity. The passage in which Arthur is described as dying in the arms of the mourning queen, is a fine instance of a poetical use of simile and figure. The moon fading in the early morning, the dazzling brightness of the rising sun, the shattered column, the glancing flight of a shooting star, bring before the mind not only the dying king, pale and bleeding, but the contrast between his present weakness and the glory and triumphs of his chivalrous and brilliant life. In a few lines his whole story is told; it is not

merely a dying warrior who lies before us, but the strength, the state, the splendour, and enjoyment of his past life, flash before the imagination, and deepen the sadness and humiliation of his defeat and death:

> For all his face was white
> And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
> Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
> And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
> Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
> That made his forehead like a rising sun
> High from the daïs-throne—were parch'd with dust;
> Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
> Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
> So like a shattered column lay the king;
> Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
> From spur to plume a star of tournament,
> Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged
> Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Let not the purpose of this analysis of detail be misunderstood. Fine phrases and fine passages do not make a fine poem; but they do shew that unflagging activity of imagination, which, operating on a finely-constructed whole, change a well-proportioned framework into a temple of carved stones, every one of which is instinct with life and thought, —where not only the *coup d'œil* strikes, but the closest and most minute examination only opens fresh sources of wonder and enjoyment. In many

poems that possess merit equal to *Morte d'Arthur*, it would be impossible to pick out single passages or lines that would be beautiful or striking, when taken from their context. *Dora* is an instance. But this examination of details proves that where Mr. Tennyson is employed upon a poem which consists of a series of actions admitting of splendid pictorial presentment, being in their own nature pictorially splendid, his pictures are drawn with a vigorous hand, and coloured to the life; and that no stroke of his brush is without meaning. And this has been done, not because it is supposed that professed admirers of Mr. Tennyson's poetry needed help to point out the just grounds of their admiration, but because many persons say they cannot see why others do so highly admire Mr. Tennyson; and to shew them that a hasty, careless glance over his verses—such as they give to a leader in a newspaper, or even less attentive and interested—is not precisely the way to arrive at the enjoyment of a poet in whom every word is the result of intense activity and concentration of the imagination, controlled by cultivated taste, and trained to a rare mastery over language and metre.

The group of poems founded on legendary history, of which *Morte d'Arthur* is the most important, consists, besides, of *Godiva*, *St. Simeon Stylites*,

Ulysses, *St. Agnes*, and *Sir Galahad*. *Godiva* would have yielded to analysis results similar to those we have obtained from *Morte d'Arthur*, resembling that poem in pictorial beauty and vivid dramatic presentation. A virginal purity, a spirit of chivalrous reverence for womanhood and self-sacrifice, veils and softens as with a halo of glory the figure of the 'woman of a thousand summers back,' as 'she rode forth clothed on with chastity.' Though compelled to pass the poem without notice of its details, we cannot but direct the attention of our readers to the intense imaginative reality of that passage in which the feelings of Godiva, as she rides through the streets, are transferred to the material objects by which she is surrounded:

> The deep air listened round her as she rode,
> And all the low wind hardly breathed for fear.
> The little wide-mouthed heads upon the spout
> Had cunning eyes to see, &c.

And again in the same spirit, subordinating the truth of literal fact to the higher dramatic truth of passion:

> And all at once,
> With twelve great shocks of sound, the *shameless* noon
> Was clash'd and hammer'd from a hundred towers,
> One after one.

The other four poems of the group aim at presenting types of character, and not at narrative of action. They take the form of speeches uttered on

occasions which adequately represent the essential characteristics of the life of the speaker. The habitual selection of this form by Mr. Tennyson is one among many indications of the intensity of his imagination. It enables him to present in the shortest compass the essentials of his subject without the intervention of any commonplace machinery, but it makes a demand upon the imaginative resources of his readers, which goes some way to explain why many persons who enjoy certain kinds of poetry are utterly unable to appreciate his. Each of these four poems contains implicitly the story of a life and the exhibition of a well-marked type of character. We cannot pause to dwell upon the force and truth of the drawing in each case, but the group is important, as indicating the versatility of Mr. Tennyson's genius, his catholicity of imaginative apprehension, and his command over the elements of the most widely differing characters. *St. Simeon Stylites* proves that it is from no want of power to paint the horrible and the grotesque that Mr. Tennyson abstains as a rule from such subjects. And *St. Agnes* is the more remarkable as showing a hearty appreciation of the purer form of asceticism in a poet whose characteristic excellence lies in the portrayal of tender sentiment and voluptuous passion, upheld and refined by a stainless purity.

We pass on to the love-poems, and in them we find the same variety of treatment, the same avoidance of repetition, just noticed in the legendary group.

The Gardener's Daughter, with its rich luxuriance of imagery, its warmth of passion, its magnificence of phrase, its *abandon* of sentiment, is not more essentially different from the severely dramatic simplicity and pathos of *Dora*, than the calm retrospect and peaceful affection of *The Miller's Daughter* is from the stormy current of slighted passion and fierce scorn that rushes wildly on through *Locksley Hall*, to find its haven in grand visions of progress and the excitement of enterprise. The playful fancy of *The Talking Oak* touches the airy treble of a scale of which *Love* and *Duty* sound the deepest and most solemn chords. The rustic grace and sweetness of *The May Queen* contrast sharply with the rude force and indignant sarcasm of *Lady Clara Vere de Vere;* while the conversational idylls blend with the level tones of ordinary conversation touches of natural beauty and flashes of elevated thought, which raise them to the rank of poems, and recal what are among the happier hours of our modern life,—those hours with cultivated and genial friends, in which the cares of the world are shaken off, and the best memories of the past, the noblest aspirations,

the gentlest feelings, revive amid mountain and lake, for the votaries of ambition, science, or business.

Then, as to form, we find narrative, dialogue, soliloquy, and direct address. We have blank verse that ranges through all the scale of feeling, from the exquisitely rhythmical, full, majestic, down to the just accented strain, that may fairly represent genial and animated conversation; we have lyric measures that flow softly on like a quiet streamlet, as in *The Miller's Daughter;* go straight and fierce to their mark like arrows of scorn, as in *Lady Clara Vere de Vere;* float gaily or sadly on in sweet calm to the music of a young girl's life and early death, as in the three strains of *The May Queen;* dash on in thunder and in storm, sweeping vast spaces, gathering in lurid gloom, or clearing in sudden flashes, impetuous hurricane of thick clouds, or dazzling brightness of tropic summer, as in *Locksley Hall.* No poet but Goethe has, in our day, swept a lyre of such varied range, with so perfect a command of every key. Moreover, none of these poems belong to the class called 'occasional.' They all have a construction which tells a complete story—often the story of a life. Some touch, frequently slight, lets us into the previous stages of the personal history, and throws forward a clear light upon the future career. The passions are treated, not merely

as giving rise to striking incidents, but as exercising a permanent influence on the character and destiny. Though for the most part lyrical in form, the poems rise, thus, to the full significance of dramas, as has been explained in respect to *The Miller's Daughter;* and similar remarks might be truly applied to all the principal poems. These qualities of variety and completeness give Mr. Tennyson a claim to a place among great poets, which the form and length of his compositions somewhat interfere with in the first rough estimate of a public inclined to set 'the how much before the how.' We can only indicate them by selected instances; but the careful analysis of any one of his poems would lead to the same conclusions.

The love story to which *The Gardener's Daughter* supplies a title and a central figure, takes the form of a narrative from the lips of the man who wooed and won the maiden for a wife. By this selection of a speaker, who is made to dwell on the blissful recollections of early love, the dramatic colouring throughout is maintained at a glowing tone, without being exposed to the charge of exaggeration. The minutest incidents, the changing lights and shades of feeling, belonging to such a period, are stamped indelibly in the memory, and never lose their first fresh charm and interest. To raise the colouring

still higher, and justify a more elaborately picturesque treatment, a fonder dwelling upon every detail of natural beauty then noted with the seeing eye of a loving heart, the speaker is not only a lover, but a painter. The motive is thus admirably chosen for treatment at once impassioned and pictorial, for the minutest detail of feeling and circumstance, for the freest play of an imaginative sympathy with nature, and the rich hues that inward joy sheds over the outward world. But Mr. Tennyson is the last man to forget that law of reserve which binds the lover—the law which a recent writer has so well expressed, when he says—

> Not to unveil before the gaze
> Of an imperfect sympathy,
> In aught we are, is the sweet praise
> And the main sum of modesty.
> Love blabbed of is a great decline;
> A careless world unsanctions sense;
> But he who casts heaven's truth to swine
> Consummates all incontinence.*

The rapture delineated in *The Gardener's Daughter* is the rapture of hope when the eyes and heart first feel the loveliness of a woman, and all nature shines in the wedding-garment, which is but the reflection of the lover's inward life. No babbling of lover's

* *The Angel in the House.*

secrets is here; no laying bare to a third person of what is perfectly befitting, graceful, beautiful, and pure when done and said at love's instinctive bidding, but becomes the contrary of these when spoken of to others, or dwelt on in cool, reflective moments. The highest emotion is sacred, only revealed to the most perfect sympathy—that of the person who excites and shares it; and even that revelation must be inarticulate, of act, of look—not of speech. There is profound beauty and truth in the allegory that represents love as a blind child; he knows no wrong, is unconscious of what he does,—trusting to a divine instinct. The speaker in *The Gardener's Daughter* holds fast to this law. He paints the courtship, not the marriage; speaks of his heart's idol as the star that shone upon his course, the sun that lighted his day; as the goddess, ere yet she stepped from her ambrosial cloud-pedestal and blessed his life with joys too sacred for the common ear. It is the beauty that he wooed, not the wife that he won, that he unveils for the listener to his tale. And as if even this were too much,—as if it were a kind of profanation to utter even these preludes of a life-blessedness to one who might, the moment after, look upon the actual woman who was their object, the speaker tells us that she has passed from earth and mortal taint,—that no second love has

confused her image; but long years of lonely widowhood have only softened and hallowed it in his heart. As he speaks, he is standing before her veiled portrait, and, raising the veil, he says—

> Behold her there,
> As I beheld her ere she knew my heart,
> My first, last love; the idol of my youth,
> The darling of my manhood, and alas!
> Now the most blessed memory of mine age.

And thus, by the slight touch, what would have been merely a charmingly told love story, becomes, in fact, a story of a life sustained by love to the end, as it was in its youth brightened and enriched by love. The single phase of passion and of fortune is not only worked out to its crisis, so as to satisfy the artistic sense of completeness, but the value and influence of that single phase is shewn as spreading through to the end of life, and the feeling that demands an eternal meaning and purpose in each stage of life is fully satisfied.

It would be impossible in any notice of Mr. Tennyson to be satisfied with a survey of the plan of what may fairly be called his most popular poem. He, indeed, constructs his poems poetically, and certainly cannot be ranked with the mere exquisite worker of detail; but all his detail is so exquisite in his finer poems, that it would be as hopeless to

attempt to convey a true impression of them without exhibiting this detail in characteristic passages, as it would be to make a person feel all the subtle and penetrating grace and sweetness of a Raffaelle Madonna by description, or to transfuse into words the glory and power of Titian's colours. After all that philosophical critics have talked of organic unity, and such-like hard phrases, since Coleridge influenced English criticism, and allowing all the importance that belongs to the facts expressed, or intended to be expressed, by the phrases, it must be admitted that the finest construction would produce little effect in poetry without fine details; and that where the genius for producing these exists, the art or instinct which combines them will seldom be wanting when the poet is mature. The real truth is, that what is often called fine detail is nothing but tawdry ornament,—the feeble or vehement effort to say fine things without having fine thoughts, —to utter raptures that are insincere and unreal, inasmuch as the imaginative power to summon up the beautiful objects supposed to justify the rapture is wanting, and the would-be poet has before him merely the general conceptions of beautiful objects, to which he applies, consequently, mere general conventional phrases. Mr. Tennyson's phrases, on the contrary, are pictures; and his rhythm the natural

music of a mind rejoicing in the beauty of the pictures that flow in ordered continuity and fulness before him. The unflagging activity of this pictorial power is manifested frequently in Mr. Tennyson's poems, by the slightest change from the ordinary phrase, as has been noticed in *Morte d'Arthur*. Here, again, in *The Gardener's Daughter*—

> My Eustace might have sat for Hercules—
> So muscular he *spread*, so broad of breast;

where the *spread* gives not the mere statement of a fact, but its actual appearance; the space fills before the eye with the bulky frame of the man, as we look.

In describing the locality of the garden, Mr. Tennyson fills the mind with the realities of the place. We know the distance from the city by hearing the funeral and marriage bells and the clanging of the minster clock, borne upon the wind; by looking out along a league of grass. The nature of the country and the time of year are given in the slow, broad stream, with its floating lilies, its pleasure skiffs, and its barges; in the rich grass meadows with their pasturing cattle, and their low-hanging lime-trees in flower, humming with winged life. And to complete the picture thus presented, the extreme distance is filled by the three-arched bridge, with the minster-towers rising above it—

> Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite
> Beyond it, blooms the garden that I love.
> News from the humming city comes to it
> In sound of funeral or of marriage bells;
> And, sitting muffled in dark leaves, you hear
> The windy clanging of the minster clock;
> Although between it and the garden lies
> A league of grass, wash'd by a slow broad stream,
> That, stirr'd with languid pulses of the oar,
> Waves all its lazy lilies, and creeps on,
> Barge-laden, to three arches of a bridge
> Crown'd with the minster-towers.
>
> The fields between
> Are dewy-fresh, brows'd by deep-udder'd kine,
> And all about the large lime feathers low,
> The lime a summer home of murmurous wings.

A landscape by Constable or De Wint would not bring the scene more clearly before the eye, or with more of the quiet truth of happy, but unimpassioned observation. But it is the high prerogative of poetry that she can throw over nature the 'wedding-garment or the shroud,' and exhibit landscape as it is coloured by emotion. It would be rash to assert perfection of anything human; but the following description of a country walk on a May morning, under the influence of the premonition of a first passion, before the subjective excitement is determined to and concentrated upon its proper object, approaches that limit. Since

> Adam first
> Embraced his Eve, in happy hour,

Love was ever the great ideal artist, at whose touch

> Every bird of Eden burst
> In carol, every bud in flower;

but he never painted a more glowing picture of a mind full of the bliss that is half-sister to desire, or of a nature reflecting the bliss in a thousand beautiful sights and sounds, than this:

> And sure this orbit of the memory folds
> For ever in itself the day we went
> To see her. All the land in flowery squares,
> Beneath a broad and equal-blowing wind,
> Smelt of the coming summer, as one large cloud
> Drew downward; but all else of heaven was pure
> Up to the Sun, and May from verge to verge,
> And May with me from head to heel. And now,
> As though 'twere yesterday, as though it were
> The hour just flown, that morn with all its sound
> (For those old Mays had thrice the life of these),
> Rings in mine ears. The steer forgot to graze,
> And, where the hedge-row cuts the pathway, stood,
> Leaning his horns into the neighbour field,
> And lowing to his fellows. From the woods
> Came voices of the well-contented doves,
> The lark could scarce get out his notes for joy,
> But shook his song together as he near'd
> His happy home, the ground. To left and right,
> The cuckoo told his name to all the hills;
> The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm;
> The redcap whistled; and the nightingale
> Sang loud, as though he were the bird of day.

We have minute touches, bringing out common objects with a passing glory that catches without chaining the attention, as well as those finished pictures upon which the mind dwells with a fixed delight of contemplation; touches that charm us with their truth, and help to mark the whole scene in its distinction of season and weather. Here are two from a crowd of such. From the lilac in crowded bloom,

> ... one warm gust, full-fed with perfume, blew
> Beyond us, as we entered in the cool.
>
> * * * * *
>
> In the midst
> A cedar spread his dark-green layers of shade.
> The garden glasses shone, and momently
> The twinkling laurels scattered silver lights;

where the epithet *silver* admirably expresses the metallic glitter of the laurel leaves in the sun, compared with the deader green of ordinary foliage.

'The last night's gale,' which had blown the rose-tree across the walk, may have been introduced mainly to give Rose a graceful occupation, and to justify a charming picture. But even if that were its main purpose, it no less contributes a fact which accounts for the marvellous transparency of the May morning, the clearness of the atmosphere shedding rapture through the veins and hearts of all living things. Applied to most poets, such an observation

would savour of over-refining, but Tennyson's never-aimless minuteness justifies it.

In the picture of Rose which follows, Mr. Tennyson has, with the true instinct of genius, avoided attempting to paint in words a beautiful human face, while he preserves dramatic propriety in not making a lover at the first glance master the expression of the countenance he afterwards knows in all its meanings. The painter-lover would be at once attracted to the picturesque attitude, general effect of dress, light and shade, the contour of the figure, and the bright points of colour—

> One arm aloft—
> Gown'd in pure white, that fitted to the shape—
> Holding the bush, to fix it back, she stood.
> A single stream of all her soft brown hair
> Pour'd on one side; the shadow of the flowers
> Stole all the golden gloss, and, wavering
> Lovingly lower, trembled on her waist—
> Ah, happy shade—and still went wavering down,
> But, ere it touch'd a foot that might have danced
> The greensward into greener circles, dipt,
> And mix'd with shadows of the common ground!
> But the full day dwelt on her brows, and sunn'd
> Her violet eyes, and all her Hebe bloom,
> And doubled his own warmth against her lips,
> And on the bounteous wave of such a breast
> As never pencil drew. Half light, half shade,
> She stood, a sight to make an old man young.

With what exquisite feeling is the progress of

the love associated with the imagery of the garden in which the loved one 'hoarded in herself, grew, seldom seen,'

> The daughters of the year,
> One after one, thro' that still garden passed.
> Each garlanded with her peculiar flower
> Danced into light, and died into the shade;
> And each in passing touch'd with some new grace
> Or seem'd to touch her, so that day by day,
> Like one that never can be wholly known,
> Her beauty grew;

and in that line, 'like one that never can be wholly known,' is revealed one exhaustless charm in all our true personal relations. Things, as things, soon weary us, because we soon know all we can ever know about them; persons are ever new, ever unfolding to us something unexpected, as they become dearer to us, and we look at them with eyes opened by sympathy and affection. Only the view of the universe, as a revelation of a personal being, supplies to outward objects exhaustless variety and interest.

The law of reserve which rules this poem has been already alluded to. It requires neither art nor genius to raise emotion of a low kind in a reader, if a writer has no reserve. The mind is sufficiently awake in all of us to realise pictures that appeal to the sensual passions; and a writer has no more difficulty in being powerful, if he give himself the

licence of some poetry, than he has in being witty, if he copy Swift's unbridled profanity and beastliness. Mr. Tennyson's glory is to have portrayed passion with a feminine purity; to have spiritualised the voluptuousness of the senses and the imagination by a manly reverence for woman's worth, and a clear intuition of 'the perfect law of liberty' through which the true humanity develops itself in the form and condition of an animal nature. He religiously observes the sanctities of love, and in graceful pictures lays down the law which he respects:

> Would you learn at full
> How passion rose thro' circumstantial grades
> Beyond all grades develop'd? and indeed
> I had not staid so long to tell you all,
> But while I mused came Memory with sad eyes,
> Holding the folded annals of my youth;
> And while I mused, Love with knit brows went by,
> And with a flying finger swept my lips,
> And spake, 'Be wise; not easily forgiven
> Are those, who setting wide the doors that bar
> The secret bridal chambers of the heart,
> Let in the day.' Here, then, my words have end.

And here must end our remarks upon *The Gardener's Daughter*. We can remember no love story that can be placed beside it in all its harmonious combination of excellences. Passion may have been dramatised more intensely; a subtle grace of sentiment, a charm of evanescent fragrance, may be felt

more in some of Shelley's lyrics, and in some of Mr. Tennyson's own; character may certainly be given with more force of individuality; and unquestionably a story more exciting in its incidents has often been told by novelist and poet: but for its delineation of the first and last love of a happy man, whose moral nature has known nothing of conflicts with itself, and whose mind has been kept healthy by the delightful occupation of the painter; for its vivid descriptions of nature in some of her loveliest aspects; for the sense of perfect enjoyment that makes the verse flow on as a full stream through a rich meadow-land, and for the touching softening of the tone as the speaker tells of the present as a calm resting-place between a blessed memory and a blessed hope, it stands unrivalled in English literature. And yet it never deviates from the familiar path of our English daily life, and is just a simple picture of that life as a joyous heart and warm affection may make it for any of us.

The forms of poetry which Mr. Tennyson adopts are not capable of interpreting the more complex moral phenomena. To shew that evil natures and evil actions have their appointed work in the world,

> That somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill,
> To pangs of nature, sins of will,
> Defects of doubt and taints of blood,—

will, in most cases, require a more complex machinery of interacting events and characters than he puts in operation. Beautiful actions and beautiful characters are their own interpretation. We need ask no questions as to the motive and ground of their existence, as to the part they bear in the harmonies of the universe. But to throw the faintest light of hope upon the lives and destinies of men and women who seem to be born only to cause suffering to themselves and others, to grow worse as they grow older, and to harden under the discipline of the moral laws of the universe, the mind must look far back into the determining causes of character and action, far forward into their remote results, and far round upon the society in which they develop themselves, and upon which they are exerting a constant modifying power, through its interests and sympathies. Even the widest glance forward, backward, and around will fail often to detect one clue to the mystery of evil; and faith can only throw herself

> Upon the great world's altar stairs
> That slope through darkness up to God.

So far, however, as the problem can be solved poetically—by exhibiting, that is, the real relations of good and evil in particular cases, and their actual connexion with each other as cause and effect—so

as to vindicate at once the eternal law of right and the goodness of God with sufficient clearness to justify the expression of the poet's view of the world in a rhythmical form, the drama or the epic will alone satisfy the necessities of the case. The lyric poet may indeed assert in glowing strains his own conviction of the ultimate solution as a general truth, or he may present his view of the working of any great moral laws in lyric allegories, like *The Palace of Art* or *The Vision of Sin;* but no machinery short of the drama or epic will enable him to solve practically, and to the conviction of his readers, the darker problems of human life. And Mr. Tennyson abstains, as a rule, from touching any actions of human beings that are not, so to speak, their own vindication, and which do not at once commend themselves to the sympathy and conscience by their own gracefulness, beauty, or nobility, the happiness, the gentleness, the vitality of mind and heart, the strength and courage of will they exhibit.

This, however, in a world where suffering and sorrow are among the appointed means of discipline for the good as well as among the punishments of the bad, leaves still scope enough for poetry of a severer character than the exquisite and happy love story we have been commenting upon. In *Dora* and *Love and Duty* the problem the poet

attempts to solve is not to shew how the eternal law of right vindicates itself against man's self-will and self-indulgence, but how the goodness of God vindicates itself against man's self-sacrifice in behalf of the right. If such vindication were impossible in the typical instances selected, the subjects would be unfit for poetic treatment. Suffering, unredeemed by its effects, may be a proper subject for the awe-struck meditations of any man; but to represent it under rhythmical forms which are symbolical of emotion flowing musically forth from a heart rejoicing in its own thoughts about the objects present to it, would be just mockery. It is only Nero that fiddles when Rome is burning. The true poet must have seen the final issue in good of the struggle he portrays, even though but in a faint and hazy glimpse. And Mr. Tennyson habitually observes this law. Even poor, perverted Simeon Stylites has glimpses of his mistake; his wretched, addled brain is clouded, but the poem closes with a breaking up of the clouds. And scarcely any other of Mr. Tennyson's poems is open to the faintest suspicion of portraying emotion merely for its dramatic interest. In *Dora* and *Love and Duty* the suffering is felt through every nerve. The simple unconscious pathos of the one, and the high-wrought reflective passion of the other, meet in this expression of a genuine grief. A three-volume

novel could not impress the essential characteristics of each tale with more vividness than the brief poems, in which the incidents are boldly sketched in outline, and the crisis of the passion struck off with a rapid and masterly force of hand. But in both poems, when the battle has been fought, the sharp agony passed, and all pretence of conventional consolation abandoned, the peace that comes of victory over self shines clearly down upon the hearts of the victims, and the striking drama, the pathetic tale, points forward to a life purified, strengthened, and even softened by the conflict. As a mere tale, *Dora* might have ended with the reconciliation; it is the higher instinct of the moral teacher that leads Mr. Tennyson to add—

> So those four abode
> Within one house together; and as years
> Went forward, Mary took another mate;
> But Dora lived unmarried till her death.

And it is not the love that

> Sits brooding on the ruins of a life,
> Nightmare of youth, the spectre of himself,

that prompts the speaker in *Love and Duty* to close his passionate recollections with a strain of exquisite sensibility to external beauty and softened visions of the future of his lost mistress,—

> Live, yet live,—
> Shall sharpest pathos blight us, knowing all

Life needs for life is possible to will—
Life happy! tend thy flowers; be tended by
My blessing! should my shadow cross thy thoughts
Too sadly for their peace, so put it back
For calmer hours in memory's darkest hold;
If unforgotten! should it cross thy dreams,
So might it come like one that looks content,
With quiet eyes unfaithful to the truth,
And point thee forward to a distant light,
Or seem to lift a burthen from thy heart
And leave thee freer, till thou wake refresh'd,
Then when the first low matin-chirp hath grown
Full quire, and morning driv'n her plow of pearl
Far furrowing into light the mounded rack,
Beyond the fair green field and eastern sea.

In *Locksley Hall* we pass to a poem of a widely different strain. It is against the fickleness of a woman, not against circumstances which leave her image pure and beautiful in the memory, that the speaker in *Locksley Hall* has to find a resource. And he finds it in the excitement of enterprise and action, in glowing anticipations of progress for the human race. He not merely recovers his sympathy with his fellow-men, and his interest in life, which had been paralysed by the unworthiness of her who represented for him all that was beautiful and good in life,—but he recovers it on higher and firmer ground. What he lost was a world that reflected his own unclouded enjoyment, his buoyant ardour and high spirits; a world appreciated mainly in its

capacity for affording variety to his perceptive activity and scope for his unflagging energies; a world of which he himself, with his pleasures and his ambitions, was the centre. What he gains is a world that is fulfilling a divine purpose, beside which his personal enjoyments are infinitely unimportant, but in aiding and apprehending which his true blessedness is purified and deepened; a world in which he is infinitely small and insignificant, but greater in his brotherhood with the race which is evolving 'the idea of humanity' than in any possible grandeur of his own. The poem has been called 'morbid,' a phrase that has acquired a perfectly new meaning of late years, and is made to include all works of art, and all views of life that are coloured by other than comfortable feelings. If *Locksley Hall*, as a whole, is morbid, then it is morbid to represent a young man rising above an early disappointment in love, and coming out from it stronger, less sensitive, more sinewed for action.

What has led certain critics to call the poem morbid is, of course, that the speaker's judgment of his age, in the earlier part, is coloured by his private wrong and grief. But it is not morbid, on the contrary, it is perfectly natural and right that outrages on the affections should disturb the calmness of the judgment, that acts of treacherous weakness should

excite indignation and scorn; and the view of the world natural to this state of mind is quite as true as that current upon the Stock Exchange, and not at all more partial or prejudiced. It is not, indeed, the highest, any more than it is a complete view, but it is higher and truer than the serene contemplation of a comfortable Epicurean or passionless thinker. There is no cynicism in the 'fine curses' of *Locksley Hall;* they are not the poisonous exhalations of a corrupted nature, but the thunder and lightning that clear the air of what is foul, the forces by which a loving and poetical mind, not yet calmed and strengthened by experience and general principles, repels unaccustomed outrage and wrong. With what a rich emotion he recals his early recollections! Sea, sandy shore and sky have been for him a perpetual fountain of beauty and of joy, his youth a perpetual feast of imaginative knowledge and pictorial glory:

Many a night from yonder ivied casement, ere I went to rest,
Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the west,

Many a night I saw the Pleiads, rising thro' the mellow shade,
Glitter like a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid.

Here about the beach I wander'd, nourishing a youth sublime
With the fairy tales of Science, and the long result of Time.

With what a touching air of tenderness and protection he watches the young girl whom he loves in

secret, and whose paleness and thinness excite his pity as well as his hope. How rapturously, when she avows her love, he soars up in his joy with a flight that would be tumultuous but for the swiftness of the motion,—unsteady but for the substantial massiveness of thought, and the grand poising sweep of the lyric power that sustains it:

Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.
Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight.
Many a morning on the moorland did we hear the copses ring,
And her whisper throng'd my pulses with the fulness of the Spring.
Many an evening by the waters did we watch the stately ships,
And our spirits rush'd together at the touching of the lips.

Then how pathetic the sudden fall, the modulation by which he passes from the key of rapture to that of despair:

O my cousin, shallow-hearted! O my Amy, mine no more!
O the dreary, dreary moorland! O the barren, barren shore!

And here and there, through all that storm of anger, sarcasm, contempt, denunciation that follows, there sounds a note of unutterable tenderness which gives to the whole movement a prevailing character of pain

and anguish, of moral desolation, rather than of wrath and vengeance. Not till this mood exhausts itself, and the mind of the speaker turns to action as a resource against despair, does he realise all that he has lost. Not only is his love uprooted,—his hope, his faith in the world have perished in that lightning flash; and he turns again to his glorious youth, but now only to sound the gulf that separates him from it. The noble aspirations, the ardent hopes, the sanguine prophecies of earlier years roll in rich pomp of music and of picture before us; but it is the cloud-pageantry of the boy's day-dream which breaks up to reveal the world as it appears now to the 'palsied heart' and 'jaundiced eye' of the man. Yet, in the midst of this distempered vision are seen glimpses of a deeper truth. The eternal law of progress is not broken because the individual man is shipwrecked. It is but a momentary glimpse, and offers no firm footing. His personal happiness, after all, is what concerns each person. Here, at least, in this convention-ridden, Mammon-worshipping Europe, where the passions are cramped, and action that would give scope to passionate energy impossible, the individual has no chance. But in some less advanced civilisation, where the individual is freer if the race be less forward, there may be hope. And a picture of the tropics rises before the

imagination, dashed off in a few strokes of marvellous breadth and richness of colour:

> There to wander far away,
> On from island unto island at the gateways of the day.
>
> Larger constellations burning, mellow moons and happy skies,
> Breadths of tropic shade and palms in cluster, knots of Paradise.
>
> Never comes the trader, never floats an European flag,
> Slides the bird o'er lustrous woodland, swings the trailer from the crag;
>
> Droops the heavy-blossomed bower, hangs the heavy-fruited tree—
> Summer isles of Eden lying in dark-purple spheres of sea.

But the deeper nature of the man controls the delusion of the fancy; his heart, reason, and conscience revolt against the escape into a mere savage freedom; they will not allow him to drop out of the van of the advancing host; and manly courage comes with the great thought of a society that is rapidly fulfilling the idea of humanity; the personal unhappiness, the private wrong, the bitterness of outraged affection, give way before the upswelling sympathy with the triumph of the race to which he belongs. The passion has passed in the rush of words that gave it expression, and life shines clear again, no longer on the tender-hearted, imaginative boy, but on the man

> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will,
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

There is no poem of Tennyson's more strikingly dramatic throughout than this, and none in which an age weakened by sentimental indulgence may find thoughts more suggestive of its recovery to manly vigour and endurance. And if, in works of art, artistic beauty alone be looked for, no poem can be more rich in colour, more rapid in movement, more abundant in exquisite beauties of detail. The verse is a marvel of force and grace,—full, majestic, impetuous, thundering on like the downrush of a mighty cataract, with its infinite pulsations of light, its dazzling interradiation of changing forms and colours—the *ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα* translated into sound. Its grand music, poured, full of grief and indignation, to the long swell of the waves upon the flat sandy shore, recals the Homeric

> Βῆ δ' ἀκέων παρὰ θῖνα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης.
> Πολλὰ δ' ἔπειτ' ἀπάνευθε κιὼν ἠρᾶθ' ὁ γεραιός—

no less by its majesty of rhythm than by the likeness of the locality.

The four principal poems in the third series of Mr. Tennyson's works which depict love in its various influences upon different characters and under differing circumstances have been now more or less fully touched on; and their general characteristic is, that the passion there shewn in operation is a purifying, strengthening, sustaining power; that it allies

itself with conscience and reason, and braces instead of debilitating the will. The small poem called *Fatima* is the only instance in which Mr. Tennyson has expended his powers in portraying any love that incapacitates for the common duties of life, unless the two *Marianas* be regarded in this light, which would be a perverse misconception of their main purpose. In *Locksley Hall* the ghost of a murdered love is fairly laid, and the man comes out of his conflict the stronger and the clearer for his experience. Nothing that can with any propriety be called morbid or unhealthy belongs to any of the great love poems in the collection; and surely the view of the relation of the sexes in the *Princess* is as sound a basis for a noble life as was ever propounded. It would be singular if, with such antecedents, Mr. Tennyson should, in the maturity of his intellect and experience, have descended to exhibit the influence of love upon a weak and worthless character, and have chosen for that purpose a melodramatic story of suicide, murder, and madness, dished up for popular applause with vehement invective on the vices of the English nation, and claptrap appeals to the war-feeling of the day. This, however, is what we are asked to believe of Mr. Tennyson's latest production, *Maud*, by the loudest professional critics of the journals and magazines. The critics give us some

gauge of their opinion by tracing Mr. Tennyson's gradual degradation through the *Princess*, lower still in *In Memoriam*, to its climax of weakness and absurdity in *Maud;* and it is but justice to say that these opinions are not now for the first time put forth on the provocation of the last-named poem, but appear to be the deliberate convictions of the writers. We believe that both the *Princess* and *In Memoriam* are in their sixth edition, which, apart from private experience, necessarily limited, of the impression the works have produced, leads to the conclusion that these writers do not in this case fairly represent the opinion of the English public. Whether they represent it any better in respect to *Maud* remains to be seen. Meanwhile it is well not to be frightened out of the enjoyment of fine poetry, and out of the instruction to be gained from a great poet's views of life, as exhibited dramatically in the destiny of a particular sort of character subjected to a particular set of influences, by such epithets as 'morbid,' 'hysterical,' 'spasmodic,' which may mean one thing or another, according to the sense, discrimination, and sympathy of the man who applies them.

There is little question as to the artistic merits of *Maud.* It is only the aim of the poet that has been assailed; his execution is generally admitted to be successful. It may be at once conceded that the

writer of the fragments of a life which tell the story of *Maud,* is not in a comfortable state of mind when he begins his record; and that if a gentleman were to utter such sentiments at a board of railway directors, or at a marriage breakfast, he might not improperly be called hysterical. Like the hero of *Locksley Hall* his view of the life around him, of the world in which his lot is cast, has been coloured by a grievous personal calamity; and the character of the man is originally one in which the sensibilities are keen and delicate, the speculative element strong, the practical judgment unsteady, the will and active energies comparatively feeble. A Shelley or a Keats may stand for example of his type; not perfect men, certainly, but scarcely so contemptible as not to possess both dramatic interest and some claim to human sympathy. Chatterton, a much lower type than either, has been thought a subject of psychological and moral interest, in spite or in consequence of the vulgar, petulant, weak melodrama of his life and death. You see, God makes these morbid, hysterical, spasmodic individuals occasionally, and they have various fates; some die without a sign; others try the world, and dash themselves dead against its bars; some few utter their passionate desires, their weak complaints, their ecstatic raptures in snatches of song that make the world delirious

with delight,—and somehow, for their sake the class becomes interesting, and we are at times inclined to measure the spiritual capacity of an age by its treatment of these weak souls,—by the fact, whether the general constitution of society cherishes such souls into divine lovers and singers of the beautiful, or lashes and starves and changes them into moping idiots and howling madmen. The autobiographer of *Maud* belongs to this class by temperament, as anyone may understand from the turn of his angry thoughts to those social evils which must and ought to excite indignation and scorn in gentle and loving natures that are at the same time inspired with generous and lofty ideas; from the speculative enigmas he torments himself with at the prevalence of rapine and pain in creation, at the insignificance of man in a boundless universe, subject to iron laws; from the penetrating tenderness, the rich fancy, the childlike *naïveté* of his love for the young girl who saves him from himself and his dark dreams. There lies in such a character, from the beginning, the capacity for weakness and misery, for crime and madness. That capacity is inseparable from keen sensibility, powerful emotions, and active imagination; and if events happen which paralyse the will already feeble, turn the flow of feeling into a stream of bitterness, and present to the imagination a world

of wrong and suffering, the capacity fulfils itself according to the force and direction of the events. In *Maud* the tendency meets with events that carry it on through these stages; and the question is whether any one of these events is impossible or improbable, whether English society is misrepresented when it is made capable of furnishing the unwholesome nutriment for such a character. It would rather seem as if the only improbable incident in the whole story were that which redeems society from a wholesome charge; as if the daughter of the millionnaire, the sister of 'the dandy-despot, the oiled and curled Assyrian bull,' were the least likely character of the whole group. God be thanked, however, there are such girls; and many a noble woman—like the Princess Ida—has given her heart out of pity to a man whose energy and hope she saw crushed for want of sympathy, and would endorse these lines:

> Perhaps the smile and tender tone
> Came out of her pitying womanhood,
> For am I not, am I not, here alone
> So many a summer since she died,
> My mother, who was so gentle and good?

And many a man who seems to himself to be living on without motive, 'a death in life,' could say,

> Ah, what shall I be at fifty,
> Should Nature keep me alive,

If I find the world so bitter
When I am but twenty-five?
Yet, if she were not a cheat,
If Maud were all that she seem'd,
And her smile were all that I dream'd,
Then the world were not so bitter
But a smile could make it sweet.

No doubt it is only weak characters who are affected in this way. To strong men the world is not made bitter by a father's ruin and suicide, by the prevalence of meanness and cruelty, by contemptuous neglect, and general absence of sympathy. Nor would a girl's smile atone to them for such calamities as do affect them. So weakness has its compensation.

But then, some one will say, if the poet's intention were to exhibit the restorative power of love over a delicate and beautiful mind overthrown by circumstances,

Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune, and harsh,—

and if, in respect to this intention, we allow the exhibition of the disease in order to feel the full force of the restoring influence, and of course are prepared that the love should be of a kind corresponding to the character,—rapturous, fanciful, childish, fitted more for a Southern woman like Juliet, as one of the best critics of *Maud* has remarked, than for an

Englishman,—why does not the poet carry out his intention, and conduct his story to a happy close? Why, good sir or madam, does not Shakspeare let Juliet and her Romeo adorn Verona with troops of little Juliets and Romeos, to do as their papa and mamma did before them? Why does not Cordelia live to comfort Lear in his old age, restored to true appreciation of his daughters? Why does Ophelia drown in a ditch; and Hamlet, after murdering Polonius, die by chance medley? Why are not Othello's eyes opened before, instead of after his fatal deed, and he and Desdemona allowed to spend the rest of their days in peace and mutual trust? Is it, think you, because Shakspeare belongs to the hysterical, morbid, spasmodic school, and likes the violent excitement of melodramatic incident? We should be sorry to stake much upon the reception any of these poetic issues would meet with from certain critics, if they now for the first time came up for judgment. Perhaps in all these cases he had some vague design of moving certain passions which the older critics knew by the name of pity and terror, and to which one who was himself something of a poet—the author of *Samson Agonistes*—refers approvingly, on the authority of Aristotle, as the justifying motive of tragedy. Perhaps, too, he might think it his business, in delineating particular

characters, to express in their destiny his view of the general condition of society, as tested by the fate and fortunes of such characters. And possibly Mr. Tennyson may think himself justified in presenting a story that does not end happily, for both these reasons. It may appear to him that 'the course of true love' would be unlikely to 'run smooth' under the circumstances of Maud and her lover, combined with the conditions of English modern life; that the man had not the coolness and self-control to master the circumstances; and that there was not in society the generosity and disregard of rank and money necessary to allow the restorative influence of Maud's affection to work out its cure. Divest the story for a moment of its lyric elevation, and compare it with our greatest novelist's treatment of a somewhat kindred case. Suppose Mr. Barnes Newcome had not been a coward as well as a brute, and had found his sister Ethel holding a *tête-à-tête* in the garden with her cousin Clive, after an evening party to which the Most Noble the Marquis of Farintosh had been invited expressly to conclude his courtship,—is it not possible that Mr. Barnes and his cousin might have enacted the scene between the 'Assyrian bull' and Maud's lover? The physical courage of the Assyrian bull is quite as true, to say the least, to the real types of his class as the physical cowardice of Barnes

Newcome. But the object of the novelist not being to excite pity and terror, he develops the selfishness and Mammon-worship of English rich people to other consequences and in another direction. The poet takes his course, too, with equal effect towards carrying out his design, and without violating, so far as we see, the essential contemporary truth of his story; while he is thus enabled to exhibit some of the eternal elements of tragedy still in operation among us.

We need say nothing of the skill and beauty with which the remorse of the murderer is painted. The wonderful power of the strains in which the successive stages of this feeling are represented, is admitted on all hands. English literature has nothing more dramatically expressive of a mind on the verge of overthrow, than the verses in which the shell on the Brittany coast serves as text; nothing that presents the incipient stage of madness, springing from the wrecked affections, with more of reality and pathos than the poem, 'Oh! that 'twere possible,' now recovered from the pages of a long-forgotten miscellany, and set as a jewel amid jewels; nothing that surpasses in truth and terrible force the madhouse soliloquy, 'Dead, long dead!' If the poem had ended there, 'the strangest anti-climax that we ever remember to have read' would not have offended a recent critic. We fear that in that case, true

enough to nature as it might have been, the climax would have come in for blame of the opposite character, and the poet have been found fault with for leaving his readers to dwell upon horrible impressions without relief. We are sure that no poet deserving the name would choose such an ending where any other was possible. But men do recover from madness, and can—though with an awe-struck sense of their own unfitness for life, a nervous apprehension that paralyses energy and action—be raised to interest themselves in something out of themselves and their miseries. And Mr. Tennyson, who introduces his hero breathing scorn and indignation on the meanness and littleness of a society, where the vices of individuals are not obscured and compensated by any conscious noble aim of the commonwealth, dismisses him, cheered and strengthened by knowing that the British nation has risen for a time to a consciousness of a great purpose; has awaked out of its commercial epicureanism, and roused itself to fight a battle for the right and the good. In sympathy with a grand purpose and a high resolve animating his countrymen, the dreary phantom that had haunted him departs; he knows that his love has forgiven him the injury that his passionate heart caused her; and he can wait, calm and hopeful, till death re-unites them.

The fact is, that Mr. Tennyson, without abandoning his lyric forms, has in *Maud* written a tragedy,—a work, that is, which demands to be judged, not by the intrinsic goodness and beauty of the actions and emotions depicted, but by their relation to character; that character again being not only an interesting study in itself and moving our sympathy, but being related dynamically to the society of the time which serves as the background of the picture, and thus displaying the characteristics of the society by shewing its influence, under particular circumstances, upon the character selected. Mr. Tennyson's critics have for the most part read the poem as if its purpose were to hold up an example for our imitation, and have condemned it because, viewed in this light, it offers nothing but a nature of over-excitable sensibilities, first rendered moody by misfortune, then driven mad by its own crime, and finally recovered to a weak exultation in a noble enterprise it has not the manliness to share. But no one feels that Shakspeare is immoral in making Othello kill himself; no one attributes the cynicism of Mephistopheles to Goethe. Why then should the author of *The Gardener's Daughter* be set down as morbid?—the author of *Locksley Hall* as one who sees no worth in action?—the author of *Dora* as a selfish dreamer, who knows nothing of

duty? Let us try and be as just to the great men that live amongst us, as to those who are beyond our praise or blame. Let us not stone our own prophets, while we build the tombs of the men who prophesied to our forefathers.

It is a step back in respect of date, to speak of *The Princess* after *Maud*; but while the latter is the deepest and most tragical exhibition of the action of love upon the character and destiny of an individual that Mr. Tennyson has given to the world, the former treats the sexual relations in their most comprehensive form, and may so be considered as containing implicitly all individual love-poems, as the poetical statement of the law which they all exhibit in particular instances. In its philosophical aim, therefore, *The Princess* belongs to the same class of poems as *The Palace of Art* and *The Vision of Sin*, in both of which a law of life is presented, not as modified by the peculiar nature and circumstances of an individual, but in its absolute universality as a law for the human race. It is natural enough that in an age when absolute and universal solutions are sought, not only for physical phenomena, but also for mental and social,—when not only the movements of the heavenly bodies and the complex relations of the constituent elements of organic matter, but the course of thought, the growth, decay, and character

of states,—in a word, the whole life of the individual, and the collective life of humanity, are supposed to be traceable to the orderly operation of fixed principles,—it is natural that, fascinated by the grandeur of speculations of this immensity, the poet, too, should attempt to rise above the portraiture of individual life to the exhibition, in an absolute form, of the principles that determine individual life. Always, indeed, it has been held that the highest poetry gave the law as well as the special instance; interpreted humanity as well as some individual life; and became highest by blending, as they say, the universal with the particular. This, however, simply means that true portraiture of individual life necessarily involves generic and specific, as well as individual truth; that John or Mary must be man and woman—English man and English woman—to be a pair of real human beings, under the influence of any particular feelings. Such poems as those mentioned above drop the individual and the special altogether, and attempt to present a law of human nature in operation upon beings who are human without being particular men or women. Now, it is the very essence of poetry to present, not abstract propositions to the intellect, but concrete real truth to the senses, the affections,—to the whole man, in short; and this can be done only by presenting

objects as they exist and act upon one another, and upon our minds, in the real world,—not logical objects formed by the action of our analytic faculty, and abstracted from reality. Such universality as poetry has is derived from the fact that the individual contains the genus and the species, and that the pure universal of the intellect has no counterpart in nature, and is therefore not a truth in the sense in which poetry concerns itself with truth. And poets who attempt to get beyond individual truth, implicitly containing generic and specific truth, fall into one of two mistakes: they either present the truth as abstract statement, dressed up in rhetorical ornament, and so fail to fulfil the true function of their genius; or, feeling the necessity of avoiding this, they invent a fictitious allegorical machinery with which they obscure the statement, and are, in fact, treating a special instance, with this difference, —that the individual traits are fanciful and arbitrary, instead of being those of actual experience. The result, in the latter case, is that the reader makes the universality by his abstraction of details, getting, at last, back to a mere abstract statement, and so loses all the force of true poetic teaching; while, as the only compensation, his imagination is amused by the ingenuity and beauty of the machinery. And in both cases, by aiming at an universality which

belongs to science, poetry loses her true prerogative; and no longer commanding the sympathies, fails to teach,—becoming at once less useful and less delightful. *The Palace of Art* and *The Vision of Sin* are instances of the one mode of treatment; *The Two Voices* may partly serve to illustrate the other. All three contain exquisite detail, but the whole fails of its effect. And were we compelled to regard *The Princess* solely as an attempt to exhibit the action and justification of sexual love as an universal law of human life, as an allegory, aiming at scientific generality, a similar failure would certainly have to be recorded. The machinery would, in that case, be overdone; would attract the attention to detail quite as much as if a merely common love-story were being told, without giving the force of reality; and would, by the preponderance of detail and traits of individuality and special circumstance, derogate from the pure universality of the problem. But, in fact, *The Princess* is 'earnest wed with sport,'—the attempt of a mind, whose feeling for the beautiful and the true is stronger than its humour and fun, to treat certain modern mistakes about the true relation of man and woman with good-humoured satire, and in spite of this intention impelled to a strain of serious thought and impassioned feeling. It is a laugh subsiding into a loving smile; playful irony surprised

into tenderness and tears. But because the commencement is mock-heroic, and the machinery highly fanciful—though not so removed from possibility as to baffle belief and distress the judgment—the earnest close seems rather the poet's own utterance of his views of the relations of the sexes than the inherent moral of the story. And admiring, as all must, the sweet tenderness and noble thought of the dialogue that ends the poem,—the magnificence, at once so rich and tasteful, of the description of the woman's college, and of the scenery about it,—the exquisite sentiment and finish of the interspersed songs and idylls,—the movement and dramatic life of the whole poem,—one cannot help regretting that the longest, and in some respects the finest, of Mr. Tennyson's productions should have been fairly characterised by him as 'A Medley,' and that he should have been obliged at last to say,

> Then rose a little feud betwixt the two—
> Betwixt the mockers and the realists;
> And I, betwixt them both, to please them both,
> And yet to give the story as it rose,
> I moved as in a strange diagonal,
> And maybe neither pleased myself nor them.

However, the incongruity is there, and we must make the best of it. It interferes somewhat with our interest in the loves of the Prince and Princess

as actual human beings, and deprives the grand philosophic sentiment at the close of the impressiveness that belongs to the moral of an actual human story. On the other hand, the impulse towards an earnest treatment of the subject, struggling through and finally overcoming the mock-heroic, gives the advantage of a contrast, and we pass from the one to the other with a heightened zest and relish. Altogether, if we give ourselves up to the poet—not setting rules for him, but letting him take us along as he will, and accepting his account of the origin and motives of his poem—we shall find nothing wanting to a complete work of art, which may not be the most profound or affecting treatment of a great truth, but which, flowering thick with beauties of detail, is graceful and noble throughout, and rises to a close in which lofty thought and passionate feeling blend, typifying the union of man and woman, in one full, rich stream of poetry,—

> The two-celled heart beating with one full stroke,
> Life.

We have not spoken of Mr. Tennyson as a song writer; yet, had he written nothing but half-a-dozen of his best songs, his place among English poets would have been incontestably high. *Flow down cold Rivulet to the Sea,—Break, break,—The Bugle Song,—Tears, idle Tears,—Come down, O Maid, from*

yonder Mountain Height,—and the lyric that sparkles through *The Brook*, would by themselves found a reputation as lasting as the English language. One might almost as well attempt to define the simple sensations or to explain why a melody in music charms the ear, as to convey in words the impression any of these songs makes upon the reader. One may analyse them, and put down the separate feelings and images of which they consist, but the effort to reflect upon them substitutes thoughts for sentiments, as some of the most delicate perfumes of flowers refuse to yield themselves to an effort, and only affect us as we catch their evanescent fragrance in fitful wafts. Take, for instance, *Tears, idle Tears*, to which the title of *Regret* might be affixed. No doubt its charm partly depends on the pathetic character of the separate images collected from human life by the dominant feeling, and on the skill with which these rise gradually to a climax. The sad pleasure excited by the waning fields in autumn—one of the lightest and most evanescent of regrets—deepens into the feelings with which the return and the departure of friends whose dwelling is beyond the ocean is regarded. It passes, by a most natural and touching gradation, to that last parting from all that is dear upon earth, when the sweetness of the least objects that have blended with happy lives is

solemnised and saddened by the thought that it is felt for the last time by the departing spirit; and that solemn sweetness passes again to a climax in the passion of tenderness and regret which makes the memory of the dead dearer than the presence of the living,—the passion of tenderness and despair which gives an agonising rapture to the dreams of hopeless love.

But the power of the song over our feelings is far greater than can be attributed to any succession of pathetic recollections of human life presented distinctly as objects of thought. It awakes all the fountains of bitter-sweet memory, sets us dreaming like a half audible strain of music in the distance, without fixing the mind to definite objects, suspends reflection and will, and brings up all the delicious sweetness of the past with the sadness that it is past, —all the brightness of our brightest moments with the cloud that so soon passes over them,—the meetings and the partings, the eternal change and flow, that make up human life. It is in its infinite suggestiveness that its charm lies; in its power, not to bring this or that pathetic remembrance before the mind, but to set the mind at the tone of delicious day-dreaming, and to give a half-blissful, half-regretful key-note to the day-dreams. And this subtle power of suggestiveness belongs more or less to all Mr.

Tennyson's songs; they all seem to touch chords that lie deeper down than the region of clear intellectual consciousness; they present definite ideas, but they present them with such delicacy of touch as to leave the mind only half conscious of their presence, —just sufficiently conscious to be set off dreaming about them, to feel their influence without being drawn out of itself to them, while the melody of the strain keeps up the creative power of dreaming at its highest activity.

Scarcely one of the more elaborate poems of which we have spoken, though its main object is to present the passion of love in its influence upon various characters under various circumstances, fails to supply abundant evidence of Mr. Tennyson's interest in other phases of life than those coloured by high emotion, and of his power to present them with new force and meaning. A fine sense of natural beauty and a marvellous faculty of word-painting adorn his love-poems with landscape pictures which need fear comparison with those of no English poet. *Locksley Hall* is a grand hymn of human progress, in which the discoveries of science, the inventions of art, the order and movement of society, the sublime hopes and beliefs of religion, blend in a magnificent vision of the age, and are sung with the rapture of a prophet to the noblest music. In *Maud* the commonest news-

paper details of the meanness, the cheating, the cruelty, the crime and misery, so rife among us, supply food to the *sæva indignatio* of the man whose temperament and circumstances make him look on the darker aspects of the time; and the same man finds in the latest topic of the day—which is also one of the grandest spectacles of our age—the comfort and the hope that restore him to sanity and peace with himself and the world. In *The Princess*, history, science, and metaphysics are touched with a light of penetrating intellect as well as a grace of poetry; the amusements of a Mechanics' Institute and the genial pleasantry of a gay picnic party contrast with the profoundest reflections on the Continental Revolutions of '48 and the most hopeful interpretations of the last new socialist theories. It is this wide range of thought, ever active in every direction to supply material for the imaginative faculty of the artist,—this catholic sympathy with modern life in all its characteristic phases, that is Mr. Tennyson's distinguishing quality, and that, in combination with his formal poetic skill, renders him the favourite poet of the cultivated classes. And it is in the development of this wide range of thought and sympathy in his poems published since 1833 that the growth and maturity of his genius mainly manifests itself. It is because he has grown and ripened as a man that his

art has seemed to become more perfect with every production.

Although, however, these qualities are abundantly evidenced by the poems hitherto treated, it would leave this survey incomplete were we not to allude to the poems which are devoted expressly to the delineation of other phases of modern life than those mainly dependent on the passion of sexual love. If there were no other motive, the necessity of indicating Mr. Tennyson's power of writing in a homelier, a less ornate and elaborate style than he generally adopts as the proper dramatic expression of the characters and moods of passion he is presenting, would be motive enough. But in fact *The Brook*, *Edwin Morris*, and *The Golden Year*, are among his most pleasing productions. *The Day Dream*, really a love-poem within a love-poem, exquisitely blends sport with earnest, and might be taken in its growth from *The Sleeping Beauty* to its present elaborate form as a type of the development of Mr. Tennyson's genius from sensuous beauty and rhythmical music to the deep heart and wise intellect of his later poems. *Audley Court* contains a charming song and a delicious moonlight landscape, besides a transcendent description of a game-pie. *Walking to the Mail* is a shrewd conversation on the causes that develop character and determine political opinion; not in

our opinion particularly worthy of blank verse or its place in the collection. Then there are the expressly political lyrics, one of which, at least, *Love thou thy Land*, is only to be compared with an essay of Lord Bacon's for its compressed energy and imaginative reality of phrase, for its fulness and wisdom of sentiment; and far above any essay of Lord Bacon's for its ardent patriotism, its noble sense of right and truth, its grand faith in human destiny, its prudence, and its courage. An obscure stanza or two scarcely make themselves felt in the recollection of its general effect.

But we must speak briefly of *In Memoriam*. What survey of Mr. Tennyson's poetry could be satisfactory without it? Certainly not ours, who do not believe all feelings to be morbid and unhealthy which are not joyous or comfortable, and who do believe that sorrow, and doubt, and meditation have their appointed beneficent influence upon human character, and are no less part of human training for a nobler and more blessed existence than mirth, and demonstrative certainty, and vigorous action. We should be guilty of treason against our deepest convictions were we to pass without a protest the notion that *In Memoriam* is a morbid mistake,—the unhealthy product of a man of genius in an unhealthy mood, degrading his genius by employing it in the

delineation of a sorrow that is unmanly and exaggerated,—a spasmodic utterance of a weak mind, that can only affect other weak minds with hysterical emotion, and incapacitate all who subject themselves to its influence for their duties to their fellow-men and their reliance upon the goodness of God. Even if we regarded *In Memoriam* as simply the record of a personal sorrow, a poetical monument to a personal friend, we should be cautious of calling it exaggerated till we were quite certain that there was anything unworthy and unmanly in binding up our hearts with the life of another, and in feeling them quiver with agony when that other life was torn from us. It is easy to understand, when social intercourse goes no deeper than liking and disliking, being amused and bored; when personal relations have dwindled down to club intimacies, and a friend is the man with whom we dine and play whist; that such a tender and rooted affection as is recorded through *In Memoriam* should appear exaggerated. The question is whether the Pall-Mall standard of human nature be the highest, whether a profound personal affection be really a weakness, or whether on the Pall-Mall theory the world would not rapidly become a pigstye or a slaughter-house. Compare the tone in which Shakspeare addresses the male friend to whom the greater number of the sonnets apply,

with Tennyson's tone in speaking of Arthur Hallam. If the one is supposed to do no discredit to the soundest-hearted as well as the largest-minded man of modern Europe, why is the other to be called morbid and exaggerated? The critics need not take so much trouble to let the world know that they are not Shakspeares and Tennysons in heart any more than in intellect. No one who knows the class would be in danger of so erroneous a supposition. But there are thousands of men and women whose affections are akin to those of these great poets, and who are grateful for the power of reading in beautiful poetry an adequate expression of their own deepest feelings. We know that such persons find in *In Memoriam* the sort of consolation and strength they find in the Psalms of David. The *suspiria de profundis* of great minds give articulate expression to, and interpret the sorrows of lesser minds, which else would darken life with 'clouds of nameless trouble,' and perhaps never find a peaceful solution.

But the personal motive of *In Memoriam* is quite inadequate as the standing-point for criticism of the poem.

> The imaginative woe
> That loves to handle spiritual strife

is operative throughout; and, as Coleridge says of love,—

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
Are all but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame—

so *In Memoriam* traverses the widest circuit of thought and feeling in search of nutriment to its mood, and represents the night-side of the soul as rich in objects and as various in hues as the side illuminated by love and joy, but all in sad greys and browns, or shining with the tender grace of the moonlight or starlight which the brilliance of the full day conceals. There is as much variety and beauty in this aspect of life as in the other; and as God has created us with large capacities for sorrow, and has placed us in circumstances which give those capacities ample employment, it is, perhaps, quite as sensible to enquire what possible meaning lies in this arrangement as to ignore the fact altogether; and quite as religious to presume that it has some beneficent meaning, and is not without a gracious design in training men to virtue and blessedness, as to attempt to baffle the arrangement by drowning the voice of nature in pleasure or in action. If all life but enjoyment and action is morbid and unhealthy, the world has been strangely misconstructed. The mere comfort and serenity of the human race seem not to have been leading objects in its design. Had

the Epicureans been consulted at the creation, they could, no doubt, have suggested several improvements. As a late eminent judge remarked, they would have had it rain only during the night; and, with Porson, when Parr, 'the schoolmaster run to seed,' pompously asked him, 'Mr. Professor, what do you think of the existence of physical and moral evil?' they would reply, 'Why, Doctor, I think we could have done very well without either.' Unfortunately, neither Epicurean, nor Stoic, nor egotist of any school or sect, was taken into counsel when the foundations of the universe were laid. And Mr. Tennyson, finding himself in a world where sorrow alternates with joy, and in a nation whose humour even has been supposed to have a serious and saturnine cast,—having heard, too, we may presume, of a text in a certain Book which says, 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,'—and having himself lost a friend who was as the light of his eyes and the joy of his heart, has not thought it an unworthy employment of his poetic gifts to bestow them in erecting a monument to his friend, upon which he has carved bas-reliefs of exceeding grace and beauty, and has worked delicate flowers into the cornices, and adorned the capitals of the columns with emblematic devices; and upon the summit he has set the statue of his friend, and about

the base run the sweetest words of love with the mournfullest accents of grief,—the darkest doubts with the sublimest hopes. The groans of despair are there, with the triumphant songs of faith, and over all, in letters of gold, surmounting the mingled posies which tell of all the moods of the human mind through its years of mourning, is the scroll on which one reads from afar:

'I am the Resurrection and the Life. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.'

Cambridge Essays, 1855.

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WORDSWORTH'S POEMS.

William Wordsworth is generally allowed to have exercised a deeper and more permanent influence upon the literature and modes of thinking of our age, than any of the great poets who lived and wrote during the first quarter of the present century. In proportion as his fame was of slower growth, and his poems were longer in making their way to the understanding and affections of his countrymen, so their roots seem to have struck deeper down, and the crown of glory that encircles his memory is of gold that has been purified and brightened by the fiery ordeal through which it has passed. Tennyson says of the laureate wreath which he so deservedly wears, that it is

> Greener from the brows
> Of him who uttered nothing base.

And this, which seems at first sight negative praise, is, in reality, a proof of exquisite discernment; for

it is just that which constitutes the marked distinction between Wordsworth and the other really original poets who are likely to share with him the honour of representing poetically to posterity the early part of the nineteenth century. In their crowns there is alloy, both moral and intellectual. His may not be of so imperial a fashion; the gems that stud it may be less dazzling, but the gold is of ethereal temper, and there is no taint upon his robe. Weakness, incompleteness, imperfection, he had, for he was a mortal man of limited faculties, but spotless purity is not to be denied him—he uttered nothing base. Our readers will anticipate us in ranking with him, as the representative poets of their age, Byron, Scott, and Shelley. Of each of these we would say a few words, especially in this representative character.

Lord Byron's poems are the actual life-experience of a man whose birth and fortune enabled him to mix with the highest society, and whose character led him to select for his choice that portion of it which pursued pleasure as the main, if not the sole object of existence. Under a thin disguise of name, country, and outward incident, they present us with the desires which actuated, the passions which agitated, and the characters which were the ideals of the fashionable men and women of the earlier part of this century. Limited and monotonous as they

are in their essential nature, ringing perpetual changes upon one passion and one phase of passion, the brilliance of their diction, the voluptuous melody of their verse, the picturesque beauty of their scenery, well enough represent that life of the richer classes which chases with outstretched arms all the Protean forms of pleasure, only to find the subtle essence escape as soon as grasped, leaving behind in its place weariness, disappointment, and joyless stagnation. The loftiest joys they paint are the thrillings of the sense, the raptures of a fine nervous organisation; their pathos is the regret, and their wisdom the languor and the satiety of the jaded voluptuary. These form the staple, the woof of Lord Byron's poetry, and with it is enwoven all that which gives outward variety and incessant stimulating novelty to the pursuits of an Englishman of fashion. These pursuits are as numerous, as absorbing, and demand as much activity of a kind as those of the student or the man of business. Among them will be found those upon which the student and the man of business are employed, though in a different spirit, and with a different aim. Thus we frequently see among the votaries of pleasure men who are fond of literature, of art, of politics, of foreign travel, of all manly and active enterprise; but all these will be pursued, not as duties to be done, in an earnest, hopeful, self-sacrificing

spirit, 'that scorns delights and lives laborious days,' but for amusement, for immediate pleasure to be reaped, as a resource against ennui and vacuity, to which none but the weakest and most effeminate nature will succumb. This difference of object and of motive necessitates a difference in the value of the results. The soil, which is ploughed superficially, and for a quick return, will bear but frail and fading flowers; the planter of oaks must toil in faith and patience and sublime confidence in the future. And so, into whatever field the wide and restless energies of men like Lord Byron carry them, they bring home no treasures that will endure—no marble of which world-lasting statue or palace may be hewn or built —no iron, of which world-subduing machines may be wrought. Poems, pictures, history, science, the magnificence and loveliness of Nature, cities of old renown, adventures of desperate excitement, new manners, languages, and characters, supply them with an ever-fresh flow of sensation and emotion, keep the senses and the faculties cognate with sense in a pleasant activity, but no well-based generalisation is gained for the understanding; facts are not even carefully observed and honestly studied; pleasant sensation was the object, and that once obtained, there is no more worth in that which produced it, though in it may lie a law of God's manifestation,

one of those spiritual facts to know and obey which would seem the chief purpose of man's existence, to discover and make them known, the noblest glory and highest function of genius. It is in this spirit that Lord Byron has questioned Life: 'Oh! where can pleasure be found?' and Life, echo-like, would only answer, 'Where!' It is because he put that question more earnestly, lived up to its spirit more fearlessly, and more faithfully and experimentally reported the answer, that he is so eminently a representative poet—a representative of what a large and important class in every country actually is, of what a far larger class aspires to be. It is in his fearless attempt at solving the problem of life in his own way, his complete discomfiture, and his unshrinking exhibition of that discomfiture, that the absolute and permanent value of his social teaching consists. For he was endowed with such gifts of nature and of fortune, so highly placed, so made to attract and fascinate, adorned with such beauty and grace, with such splendour of talents, with such quick susceptibility to impressions, with such healthy activity of mind, with such rich flow of speech, with such vast capacity of enjoyment, that no one is likely to make the experiment he made from a higher vantage ground, with more chances of success. And the result of his experience he has given to the world, and has thrown

over the whole the charm of a clear, vigorous, animated style, at once masculine, and easy, and polished, sparkling with beauty, instinct with life, movement, and variety; by turns calm, voluptuous, impassioned, enthusiastic, terse, and witty, and always most prominent that unstudied grace, that Rubens-like facility of touch, which irresistibly impresses the reader with a sense of power, of strength not put fully forth, of resources carelessly flowing out with exhaustless prodigality, not husbanded with timid anxiety and exhibited with pompous ostentation. It is the combination of these qualities of the artist, with his peculiar fearlessness and honesty of avowal —his plain, unvarnished expression of what he found pleasant, and chose for his good, that will ever give him a high, if not almost the highest place among the poets of the nineteenth century, even with those readers who perceive and lament the worthlessness of his matter, the superficiality and scantiness of his knowledge, the want of purity and elevation in his life and character. Those will best appreciate his wonderful talents who are acquainted with the works of his countless imitators, who have admirably succeeded in reproducing his bad morality, his superficial thoughts, and his characterless portraits, without the fervour of his feeling, the keenness of his sensations, the ease and vigour of his language, the

flash of his wit, or the knowledge of the world, and the manly common-sense which redeemed and gave value to what else had been entirely worthless.

If the name of Lord Byron naturally links itself with the fashionable life of great cities; with circles where men and women live mutually to attract and please each other; where the passions are cherished as stimulants and resources against ennui, are fostered by luxurious idleness, and heightened by all the aids that an old and elaborate material civilisation can add to the charms of beauty, and the excitements of brilliant assemblies; where art and literature are degraded into handmaids and bondslaves of sensuality; where the vanity of social distinction fires the tongue of the eloquent speaker, wakens the harp of the poet, colours the canvas of the painter, moulds the manners and sways the actions, directs even the loves and the hatreds of all; no less naturally does the name of Sir Walter Scott stand as the symbol and representative of the life and tastes of the country aristocracy, who bear the titles and hold the lands of the feudal barons, and of the country gentlemen whose habits and manners are in such perfect contrast to those of the Squire Westerns to whose places they have succeeded. Possessing in a high degree the active and athletic frame, the robust health, the hardy training, the vigorous nerve, the bold spirit,

the frank bearing, and the genial kindness of the gentlemen of the olden time, he could heartily appreciate and unhesitatingly approve all that time and revolution had spared of feudal dominion and territorial grandeur. The ancient loyalty, so happily tempering the firmness of a principle with the fervour of a feeling, never beat higher in the heart of a cavalier of the seventeenth than in that of the Scottish Advocate of the nineteenth century. Every one will remember that he refused to write a life of Mary, Queen of Scots, because in reference to her conduct, his feelings were at variance with his judgment. And in painting those old times in which his imagination delighted to revel, all that would most have revolted our modern mildness of manners, and shocked our modern sense of justice, was softened down or dropped out of sight, and the nobler features of those ages,—their courage, their devotion, their strength and clearness of purpose, their marked individuality of character, their impulses of heroism and delicacy, their manly enterprise, their picturesque costumes and manners of life, were all brought into bold relief, and placed before the reader with such fulness of detail, in such grandeur of outline, in such bright and vivid colouring, as gave even to the unimaginative a more distinct conception of, and a more lively sympathy with, the past than they

could gain for themselves of the present, as it was whirling and roaring round them, confusing them with its shifting of hues and forms, and stunning them with its hurricane of noises. And apart from the fascination which History, so presented, must have for the descendants of men and classes of historical renown, for the hereditary rulers and the privileged families of a great country, and though probably the creator of the splendid pageantry was definitely conscious of no such purpose, yet there must have mingled with this fascination, and have infused into it a deeper and more personal feeling, the regretful sense that the state of society so glowingly depicted had passed away,—a foreboding that even its last vestiges were fast disappearing before the wave of democratic equality, and the uprising of a new aristocracy of wealth and intellect. If at the time those famous verse and prose romances came upon the world in a marvellously rapid succession, all that the public were conscious of was a blind pleasure and unreflecting delight, it is no less true that in an age of revolution they raised up before it in a transformed and glorified life the characters, the institutions, the sentiments and manners of an age of absolute government by the strong arm or by divine right—of an age of implicit belief, inspiring heroic action, sanctioning romantic tenderness, harmonising and

actuating all the virtues that adorn and elevate fallen humanity; and that since then there has arisen in our country a thoughtful reverence and love for the past—a sense of the livingness and value of our history—a desire and a determination to appreciate and comprehend, and so not forfeit, the inheritance of wisdom, forethought, brave action, and noble self-denial, which our ancestors have bequeathed to us. How many false and puerile forms this feeling has taken it does not fall within our present scope to notice. In spite of white-waistcoat politics and Pugin pedantries, the feeling is a wise and a noble one,—one which is the surety and the safeguard of progress; and that much of it is owing to the interest excited so widely and so deeply by Sir Walter Scott's writings, those will be least disposed to deny who have thought most on the causes which mould a nation's character, and the influences which work out a nation's destiny.

It is no fanciful or arbitrary spirit of system that while we assign to Byron the empire over the world of fashion and of pleasure, and seek the mainspring of Scott's popularity in the sway of old historical traditions over a landed aristocracy, and the longing regret with which they look back to a state of society passed or rapidly passing away, we should regard Shelley as the poetical representative of those

whose hopes and aspirations and affections rush forward to embrace the great Hereafter, and dwell in rapturous anticipation on the coming of the golden year, the reign of universal freedom, and the establishment of universal brotherhood. By nature and by circumstance he was marvellously fitted for his task; gentle, sensitive and fervid, he shrank from the least touch of wrong, and hated injustice with the zeal and passion of a martyr, while, as if to point him unmistakeably to his mission, and consecrate him by the divine ordination of facts, he was subjected at his first entrance into life to treatment, both from constituted authority and family connexion, so unnecessarily harsh, so stupidly cruel, as would have driven a worse man into reckless dissipation, a weaker man into silent despair. Most men, he says himself,

> Are cradled into poetry by wrong;
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song.

Whether this be the best or most usual training for the poet may well be doubted, but it is quite indubitable that such discipline will soonest open a man's eyes to the evils of existing institutions, and the vices of old societies; and will lend to his invectives that passion which raises them above satire,—to his schemes, that enthusiasm which redeems them from being crotchets; will turn his abstract abhorrence of

oppression into hatred against the oppressors; his loathing of corruption into a withering scorn and contempt for tyrants and their tools, the knaves and hypocrites who use holy names and noble offices to promote their selfish ends, and to fetter and enslave their brother men. And so it happened with Shelley. The feelings of poignant anguish and bitter indignation, which had been roused in him by cruelty and injustice towards himself, coloured all his views of society, and at once sharpened his hostility to the civil and religious institutions of his country, and lent more glowing colours to the rainbow of promise that beamed upon him from the distance, through the storm of bloodshed and revolution. Add to this, that his mind was ill-trained, and not well furnished with facts; that he could draw from form, colour, and sound, a voluptuous enjoyment, keener and more intense than the grosser animal sensations of ordinary men; that his intellect hungered and thirsted after absolute truth, after central being, after a living personal unity of all things. Thus he united in himself many of the mightiest tendencies of our time, —its democratic, its sceptical, its pantheistic, its socialistic spirit; and thus he has become the darling and the watchword of those who aim at reconstructing society, in its forms, in its principles, and in its beliefs,—who regard the past as an unmitigated

failure, as an entire mistake; who would welcome the deluge for the sake of the new world that would rise after the subsidence of the waters. Nor has their affectionate admiration been ill bestowed. With one exception, a more glorious poet has not been given to the English nation; and if we make one exception, it is because Shakspeare was a man of profounder insight, of calmer temperament, of wider experience, of more extensive knowledge; a greater philosopher, in fact, and a wiser man; not because he possessed more vital heat, more fusing, shaping power of imagination, or a more genuine poetic impulse and inspiration. After the passions and the theories which supplied Shelley with the subject-matter of his poems have died away and become mere matters of history, there will still remain a song, such as mortal man never sung before, of inarticulate rapture and of freezing pain,—of a blinding light of truth and a dazzling weight of glory, translated into English speech, as coloured as a painted window, as suggestive, as penetrating, as intense as music.

We have assigned to three great poets of our age the function of representing three classes, distinct in character, position, and taste. But as these classes intermingle and become confused in life, so that individuals may partake of the elements of all three, and, in fact, no one individual can be exactly defined

by his class type, so the poets that represent them have, of course, an influence and a popularity that extend far beyond the classes to whose peculiar characteristics and predominant tastes we have assumed them to have given form and expression. Men read for amusement, to enlarge the range of their ideas and sympathies, to stimulate the emotions that are sluggish or wearied out; and thus the poet is not only the interpreter of men and of classes to themselves, but represents to men characters, modes of life, and social phenomena with which they are before unacquainted, excites interest, and arouses sympathy, and becomes the reconciler, by causing misunderstandings to vanish, as each man and each class comprehends more fully the common humanity that lies under the special manifestation, the same elemental passions and affections, the same wants, the same desires, the same hopes, the same beliefs, the same duties. It is thus especially that poets are teachers, that they aid in strengthening and civilising nations, in drawing closer the bonds of brotherhood.

He of whom it is our special purpose in this article to speak, has said of himself, 'The poet is a teacher. I wish to be considered as a teacher, or as nothing.' If we are asked wherein lay the value of his teaching, we reply, that it lay mainly in the power that was given him of unfolding the glory and

the beauty of the material world, and in bringing consciously before the minds of men the high moral function that belonged in the human economy to the imagination, and in thereby redeeming the faculties of sense from the comparatively low and servile office of ministering merely to the animal pleasures, or what Mr. Carlyle has called 'the beaver inventions.' That beside, and in connexion with this, he has shewn the possibility of combining a state of vivid enjoyment, even of intense passion, with the activity of thought, and the repose of contemplation. He has, moreover, done more than any poet of his age to break down and obliterate the conventional barriers that, in our disordered social state, divide rich and poor into two hostile nations; and he has done this not by bitter and passionate declamations on the injustice and vices of the rich, and on the wrongs and virtues of the poor, but by fixing his imagination on the elemental feelings, which are the same in all classes, and drawing out the beauty that lies in all that is truly natural in human life. Dirt, squalor, disease, vice, and hard-heartedness, are not natural to any grade of life; where they are found, they are man's work, not God's; and the poet's business is not with the misery of man's making, but with the escape from that misery revealed to those that have eyes to see, and ears to hear,—we mean, that no

true poet will be merely a painter of that which is low, deformed, essentially inhuman, as his ultimate and highest aim, though, as means, he may, as the greatest poets have done, use them to move and rouse the sleeping soul. This, we say, in answer to those that asserted that Wordsworth was not a true painter of manners and characters from humble life: we say he was, for that he painted, as minutely as served his aim, that which was essential to its occupations and its general outward condition—that which it must be, if Christian men are to look upon the inequalities of wealth and station as a permanent element in society. And all this which he taught in his writings, he taught equally by his life. And furthermore, he manifested a deep sense of the sacredness of the gift of genius, and refused to barter its free exercise for aught that the world could hold out to him, either to terrify or to seduce; and he lived to prove, not only that the free exercise of poetic genius is its own exceeding great reward, bringing a rich harvest of joy and peace, and the sweet consciousness of duty well discharged, and God's work done; but, what was quite as much needed in our time, he shewed that for the support and nourishment of poetic inspiration, no stimulants of social vanity, vicious sensuality, or extravagant excitement, were requisite, and that it could flourish in the highest

vigour on the simple influence of external nature, and the active exercise of the family affections.

William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, in Cumberland, on April 7th, 1770, the second son of John Wordsworth, attorney and law agent to Sir James Lowther, created Earl of Lonsdale. His mother was a Miss Cookson of Penrith, and both parents belonged to families of high antiquity and great respectability,—a fact which may not have been without its influence on the poet's feelings and opinions. Mrs. Wordsworth died when her son was nearly eight years old, but not too early to have discerned in him qualities which made her anxious about his future life, and to impress her with the presentiment that he would be remarkable for good or evil. He himself attributes this feeling of hers to his 'stiff, moody, and violent temper.'

If however it be true that the child is father to the man, Mrs. Wordsworth had probably better reason for anticipating a remarkable career for her son than was given by any excess of mere boyish obstinacy and self-will. In the fifth book of the *Prelude* he describes her mode of education as based upon a

> Virtual faith that He
> Who fills the mother's breast with innocent milk,
> Doth also for our nobler part provide,

Under His great correction and control,
As innocent instincts and as innocent food.

* * * *

This was her creed, and therefore she was pure
From anxious fear of error or mishap,
And evil, overweeningly so called,
Was not puffed up by false unnatural hopes,
Nor selfish with unnecessary care;
Nor with impatience from the season asked
More than its timely produce; rather loved
The hours for what they are, than from regard
Glanced on their promises in restless pride.
Such was she—not from faculties more strong
Than others have, but from the times, perhaps,
And spot in which she lived, and through a grace
Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,
A heart that found benignity and hope,
Being itself benign.

And so the first peril of childhood was escaped, and that a peril of no small moment, when the child is a genius, and the mother knows it, and ponders it in her heart; the peril of overstimulation of faculties already precociously developed, bringing with it, as its sure result, prodigious vanity and premature exhaustion. Nor were other influences besides those of a wise mother's loving care wanting to train the future poet. The picturesque Derwent, blending with his nurse's song, flowed murmuring along his infant dreams, and composed to more than infant softness his earliest thoughts and sensations. A few

years later, the same river was his 'tempting playmate.' He would, when five years old, 'make one long bathing of a summer's day,' 'bask in the sun, and plunge, and bask again, alternate.' Happy child! the seed-time of whose soul can thus be entrusted to God and Nature. Wise mother! who knows how to aid, without superseding natural influences and instinctive tendencies—to let the child grow at its natural pace, and in its natural direction —not to raise it upon stilts, or straiten it in stays. How much wiser would the manhood of many of us be, if our childhood had been more joyous and less trammelled, less made to bend to the whims, systems, or caprices of the elderly pedants about us. We of course know that children are not diminutive angels, and need both instruction and correction; but we believe every sensible mother in the three kingdoms will go with us in an avowal of a decided preference for troublesome, ill-behaved children, over the good little boys and girls, who know the elements of all the ologies, and can define many of the isms—who never dirty their pinafores, and decline eating their dinners till grace has been said.

To return to William Wordsworth. Another influence, that was to endure, and colour his whole life, had already begun to act upon him. His sister Dorothy was two years younger than himself; the part she

played in the formation of his character he exquisitely describes in his poem to the 'Sparrow's Nest':

> The blessing of my later years
> Was with me when a boy.
> She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
> And humble cares, and delicate fears;
> A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
> And love, and thought, and joy.

But one blow carried off the mother and separated brother and sister—the latter went to reside with her maternal relations; the former was sent to school at Hawkeshead, near the lake of Esthwaite. He had already been instructed in the rudiments of learning at Cockermouth by the Rev. Mr. Gilbanks; and his father, who is said to have been a person of considerable mental vigour and eloquence, had contributed to his education by setting him very early to learn passages from the best English poets by heart, so that he could repeat large portions of Shakspeare, Milton, and Spenser. It was probably no great misfortune for Wordsworth that the north-country schools did not pay that attention to classical composition which enables Eton, Rugby, Shrewsbury, and our other great public schools, to send up men to the Universities who can write Greek with the purity of Xenophon, and Latin with the elegance of Cicero. At any rate, such was the case; and the

only learning he seems to have acquired at Hawkeshead was a fair knowledge of Latin, and an acquaintance with the elements of mathematics. But he tells us that his school days were very happy, chiefly because then, and in the vacations, he was left at liberty to read whatever books he liked. He instances Fielding, Cervantes, Le Sage, and Swift; and particularises *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Tale of a Tub* as being much to his taste. The readers of the *Prelude* need not be told that his real education at school lay neither in the study of Latin, nor in the perusal of the works of the humorists, which exercised little apparent influence upon the formation of his tastes, or the character of his subsequent writings. Already that strong individuality had displayed itself, which was to issue in the conquest of new fields for the creative energy of the poet, of a new poetical philosophy for the analysis of the critic. Already in the pursuit of his boyish amusements—in springing woodcocks in autumn, in taking nests in spring, in skating on the frozen lake of Esthwaite, or rowing on bright half-holidays with his companions along 'the plain of Windermere'—he had begun to feel the presence of Nature in the sky and on the earth; already had he become a worshipper in that shrine, of which he afterwards was the acknowledged high-priest.

It would be as sacrilegious, as it is unnecessary, to translate into bald prose those high-coloured and nobly musical passages of the *Prelude* in which he traces the influence of the grand and beautiful scenery amid which his school-days were fortunately passed, in awakening his sensibility, in associating his animal sensations with outward objects that were magnificent and lovely, and so ministering to genial and happy moods of mind by the constant supply of pure and ennobling pleasures. As pleasurable excitement is almost the necessary condition of poetical activity, too much importance can hardly be attributed to the circumstances which secured to Wordsworth, in his most plastic time of life, an unfailing flow of joyous spirits from purely elevating sources, and preserved him, while reason was yet undeveloped, and self-command had not yet become a habit, from those temptations to coarse pleasures, and even gross vices, which form so weighty a counterpoise to the scholarship and manly training of our great public schools. Nor was this awakening passion for nature less efficacious or important in thus early laying the foundation of those habits of observation and reflection which not only supplied him through life with his matter for poetical composition, but freed him from that necessity for companionship and conversation which weakens the character and fritters away the

strength of so many men of genius. Wordsworth, even as a boy, was self-sufficing and independent; solitude to him was blithe society, though no one took more interest in boyish sports, or speaks with more affectionate remembrance of boyish friendships. What helped to this was the unusual degree in which a genuine poetic activity was conjoined with, and awakened by, his receptive sensibility. A plastic power, he tells us,

> Abode with me; a forming hand, at times
> Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;
> A local spirit of his own, at war
> With general tendency; but, for the most,
> Subservient strictly to external things,
> With which it communed. An auxiliar light
> Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
> Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
> The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on
> Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
> A like dominion; and the midnight storm
> Grew darker in the presence of my eye.

The prominence which is given in Wordsworth's poetry to this reciprocal action of external nature and the mind of man, is that which mainly distinguishes him from, and raises him above, merely descriptive or merely didactic poets. Nature to him was not a canvas variously coloured, from which he was to select what soothed or excited the sense, and paint in words what was given to him from without;

nor was man an incarnate intellect whose senses were merely channels of communication between his animal wants and the material objects which supplied them, or, at best, purveyors for the fancy in her airy dreams and unreal analogies; but the one was related to the other by a vital and organic union, which admitted of no severance, but to the detriment, if not the destruction, of moral and spiritual life. Nature was to him a mystic book, written by the finger of God, whose characters were indeed discernible by the senses, but whose meaning was only to be deciphered by the imagination—

> By observation of affinities
> In objects where no brotherhood exists
> To passive minds.

The book of Nature and the world of imagination are phrases, indeed, that have long been favourites with men of sensibility and men of science; but the truths that have been read in the one have usually been generalisations of the analytic understanding, or the facts upon which such generalisations are founded, while the other has been looked upon as peopled only by chimeras, and given up to the visionary and the dreamer. Mr. Wordsworth's originality in this matter consists in his assertion of a science of appearances, speaking through the senses to the heart and soul, acting on and acted upon by

the imagination in accordance with laws, which it is the poet's business to discover and obey; and not simply in this assertion of a philosophy of æsthetic, which would justify such expressions as the 'sensuous false and true,' in opposition to the pure idealist theory of the falseness of all sensuous perception; but furthermore and mainly in the importance he attaches to a right understanding of this science for the production of genuine poetry, and a practical obedience to it for the building up of the moral being of the individual man. Whether his conclusions on this point are the result of what he possessed in common with all men, or of the exceptional predominance of the imaginative activity in him, may perhaps admit of discussion. Certain it is, that more than almost any poet, he was from childhood 'of imagination all compact,' and equally certain is it, that, unless social arrangements can be totally altered, it is hard to see how the bulk of our population can be placed in circumstances at all admitting, not to say favourable to, the cultivation of the imaginative power; while to suppose them for this reason debarred from attaining moral and religious excellence, would indeed sadden our prospects for the future, change all our boasted civilisation to a diabolic delusion, and justify any schemes, however extravagant, that promised to relieve our upper classes from

so heinous a crime, and our lower classes of towns and cities, and—in spite of Mr. Wordsworth—the majority of our peasants, from so dire a destruction. This theory of the function of imagination in the human economy, and of the function of external nature in awakening and evoking its power, is so prominent in all Mr. Wordsworth's higher poetry—is so much the key-note to what his earlier critics called his mysticism and affected raptures—that we have felt it necessary to allude to it somewhat at length, though to handle it at all adequately would require a philosophical treatise, which has never yet been written, though often talked about. As originating in his own boyish experiences, it properly belonged to this part of our subject, and may further be taken as an instance of the limitation which is necessary in applying any of Mr. Wordsworth's theories of society. They are all personal experiences thrown into the form of general truths, with that strength of phrase and colour of passion which belong to an essentially subjective view.

We may conclude these records of Wordsworth's schoolboy experience by mentioning that he was already a poet actual as well as potential, and that a copy of verses in heroic metre, written by him in his fourteenth or fifteenth year (it is rather doubtful which), on the second centenary from the foundation

of the school by Archbishop Sandys, is preserved; of which, though the poet himself speaks slightingly, as a tame imitation of Pope's versification, and a little in his style, it is not too much to say that very few boys of that age could have possibly written them.

His father had died while William was yet a schoolboy, in the year 1783. Lord Lonsdale, whose agent he was, refused to settle his accounts, and the sum of which the children, four sons and one daughter, were thus deprived, was the bulk of their fortune. It was afterwards paid in 1802, with interest, by the second Earl of Lonsdale; but meanwhile, the family of the Wordsworths were dependent upon their relations, and William was sent by his uncles, Richard Wordsworth and Christopher Crackenthorpe, in the year 1787, to St. John's College, Cambridge.

From what has been stated of William Wordsworth's studies, attainments, character, and tastes while he was at Hawkeshead, no reasonable surprise can be entertained that the pursuits, the honours, and the emoluments of Cambridge failed to excite his industry or stimulate his ambition. The excellence to which the University at that time confined her rewards and distinctions was limited within the range of mathematics, pure and applied, and that

highly valuable, but by no means comprehensive scholarship, which is expressed by the phrase, a knowledge of Latin and Greek; what is excluded being simply the literature, the philosophy, and the history of the two great model nations, and what is included being the power of translating correctly at sight, and of composing in prose and verse. We say at that time, because, though very little extension has actually taken place, yet a new and enlarged system has just come into operation, from which the most beneficial results on national education are to be expected. Moreover, Wordsworth went to a college which is now especially, and was, we believe, exclusively devoted to the study of mathematics. It is more than possible that those men in whom taste and imagination are predominant are, as the learned Master of Trinity would maintain, the very men who would profit most by the rigid processes and absolute results of mathematics; poets have themselves been famous for saying and writing fine things about the beauty of mathematical demonstrations, and the winning charms of pure truth; Wordsworth has made Euclid's Elements the subject of an exquisite episode in his autobiographical poem; but equally certain it is that either in cautious self-denial, fearing to be hooked for life by the too seducing bait of the Lady of lines and angles, or that the

brightness of her heavenly glory should dazzle them into blindness, or scorch them into annihilation, or from some other cause equally powerful, poets generally content themselves with singing the praises of the sublime and starry science, and leave to others the profit and the praise of worshipping in her temple and assuming the robes and crown of her hierophants. Wordsworth was no exception,—no trace of his mathematical studies appears in the records of his college life, no result beyond that of an ordinary B.A. degree appears to have attended them. The only positive result of his Cambridge reading seems to be the acquisition of Italian. We are not aware that he ever regretted his neglect of University studies, though his nephew implies as much, founding his belief on an exhortation addressed, we presume, to himself by his uncle, on the importance of mastering the classical writers before coming to the modern; and in a letter addressed to the son of a friend, regretting that he had given up reading for honours. We would suggest to Dr. Christopher Wordsworth that his uncle might see good reason for advising him to confine his attention to that which constituted his path to distinction, without at all regretting the deliberate choice of his own life, or implying the general advisability of the course he recommended to one young man of singularly academic mind and

character. But this is only a specimen of the way in which the nephew has reflected his own likeness upon the canvas prepared for his uncle. But to return to the poet. Cambridge seems to have done nothing for him; not only were the studies of the place distasteful to him, but the country was eminently disqualified for exciting, or even sustaining, the poetic susceptibility of one who had been, up to that time, a free wanderer among the hills and vales and lakes of lovely, romantic Westmoreland. Even Wordsworth, with his creative gift, failed to gain an insight into what there is in that flat, fenny district capable of conversion into exquisite poetry. That conquest has been achieved by a younger poet; and now and henceforth *Mariana in the Moated Grange* and the *Dying Swan* stand to give the lie to any one who dares to call Cambridge and Lincoln utterly barren of nourishment for minds which crave external beauty, or languish and sicken from starvation. We may add, from personal acquaintance, that these flat counties are famous for their glorious sunsets. But Wordsworth's heart was all the time among his mountains and his waterfalls; the Cam to him was specifically the *silent* Cam; and but for his vacations the poetic spirit would have been imperilled. By these, his love and intense enjoyment of nature were sustained, enhanced by months of absence and longing

and regret; and with them began now to appear another range of faculties, called into exercise by the varieties of character his Cambridge life presented to him, and the contrast it afforded to the life he had left behind him. He began now to take that interest in observing the passions, characters, and actions of the men and women around him, which, supplying him with the incidents, the feelings, and, to some extent, with the very language of his most original minor poems, finally enabled him to rear the noblest edifice of modern song, where, uniting in himself the philosophical breadth of Coleridge with the minute touches and more than the homely pathos of Crabbe, he forms into one organic whole the profoundest speculations on society with the simplest annals of the poor. It is only a proof of the exceeding purity and elevation of his character, that he finds ground for mild self-reproach in the innocent enjoyment of rustic balls and innocent flirtations—'love-likings,' as he prettily calls them—with rustic belles, which seem to have partially occupied his first long vacation. Truth to say, we wish he had taken a more lively interest in such matters. The absence of this side of human nature from Wordsworth's poetry imparts to it a heaviness, a monotony, which repels the young and the worldly, to whose minds his lofty wisdom and his noble seriousness might

perchance find admission and welcome. But great men are not to be fashioned after our will, but according to the ordering of Him who sends them to do His work in the world; and special work demands a special training. It is only this consideration that prevents us from seriously regretting that Wordsworth did not, as a young man, join more heartily in what are commonly called the pleasures of the world. There can be no doubt that, had he done so, he would have exerted an earlier and a wider influence on society; he would have understood better the pursuits and the pleasures of the men and women of cities; he would have sympathised more with the life of the burgher classes. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that, in that case, he would scarcely have so fascinated and controlled the 'fit audience, though few,' whom no one ever asked for more sincerely or more successfully; his poetical creed would scarcely, in that case, have had its apostles, its martyrs, its confessors; it would not have been so fiercely combated, and would not therefore have exhibited such a marked triumph of truth, have been rooted so deeply in the conviction of its votaries. Had his genius, again, played more upon the surface of society, dealt more with the passions and the vanities of men congregated together, it might have lost something of that depth, of that

permanent and elemental character that now renders his reflections and speculations so valuable and interesting to minds at all kindred to his own. Nor is it easy to conceive the simplicity and calm of Wordsworth's life and character failing to unfit him for fairly estimating English middle-class life and people, with their multiform bustle, their eager pursuit of wealth, their love and need of outward excitement. With all his greatness, he was neither Shakspeare nor Goethe; and probably had he striven for many-sidedness, he would have been less than he was. And so, recalling our half-formed expression of regret, we may accept the fact, in all thankfulness and humility, that he soon gave up the chase of trivial pleasures, and returned to where his deeper passion lay; though, as we have hinted above, these trivial pleasures of his Cambridge and vacation life were, in all probability, the appointed means of evoking that meditative observation of men and character, which makes his poetry no less rich in wisdom than in beauty and feeling. One special occasion he notes, when, after being all night at a country ball, his whole being was stirred within him, as

> Magnificent
> The morning rose in memorable pomp;

and there came upon him one of those crises, so marked in the history of great minds, which colour

the whole after-course of existence. To the brim, he says,

> My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
> Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
> Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
> A dedicated Spirit. On I walked
> In thankful blessedness, which yet survives.

And to this consecration, the silent influences of the morning, poured upon his head by the invisible hand, he remained faithful as few priests have ever been to their calling. What the world has gained by his loyalty is to be seen in his works; what he might otherwise have become, may be gathered from those parts of the *Prelude* in which he records his Cambridge and London experience, especially from that magnificent passage where, describing his general impression of University life, he clothes the stern denunciation of a Juvenal in language as strong as Dryden's, as rich, sensuous, and full of meaning as Shakspeare's:

> All degrees
> And shapes of spurious fame and short-lived praise
> Here sate in state, and fed with daily alms
> Retainers won away from solid good;
> And here was Labour, his own bond-slave; Hope,
> That never set the pain against the prize;
> Idleness, halting with his weary clog,
> And poor misguided Shame, and witless Fear,
> And simple Pleasure, foraging for Death;

> Honour misplaced, and Dignity astray;
> Feuds, factions, flatteries, enmity, and guile,
> Murmuring submission, and bald government
> (The idol weak as the idolater),
> And Decency and Custom starving Truth,
> And blind Authority beating with his staff
> The child that might have led him; Emptiness
> Followed as of good omen, and meek Worth,
> Left to herself, unheard of and unknown.

In connexion with this noble passage, shewing what Wordsworth could have done had he chosen to cultivate the higher form of satire, it is interesting to find him afterwards declining to allow the publication of some imitations of Juvenal, executed as a young man, though solicited by his friend Archdeacon Wrangham, and basing his refusal on moral objections to the lowering influence of this species of composition.

Wordsworth's last long vacation was spent in travelling abroad with his friend Mr. Jones. The tourists landed at Calais on July 13th, 1790, the eve of the day when Louis XVI. took the oath of fidelity to the new constitution; proceeded principally on foot through France, Savoy, Piedmont, North Italy, Switzerland, and up the Rhine, returning in time for the Cambridge October term. The poem entitled *Descriptive Sketches* is the record of this continental tour. A more important

result of it was the warmer sympathy it excited in young Wordsworth with the then fair promise and exulting hopes of the French Revolution. In a letter to his sister Dorothy, from the Lake of Constance, he speaks in enthusiastic terms of the French as compared with the Swiss, adding, 'But I must remind you that we crossed at the time when the whole nation was mad with joy, in consequence of the revolution. It was a most interesting period to be in France; and we had many delightful scenes where the interest of the picture was owing solely to this cause.' It is more than ever superfluous for us, who have since that time been witness to two French revolutions, and the enthusiastic hope they excited, with the miserable disappointment that has in each case ensued, to go far in search of reasons to justify or explain the sympathy which Wordsworth, in common with all the generous-hearted young men of his day, felt and expressed with the first and greatest of the democratic convulsions which have since been constantly working to upheave and alter the surface of European society. The man who at that time had not so sympathised must have been duller than an owl, or wiser than an angel. It is sufficient here to observe that when the French Revolution departed from its first love and its first faith, and developed into that hybrid

monster of cruelty, tyranny, and licentiousness, which made the despotism of the Empire a welcome refuge, Wordsworth was not misled by the vanity of consistency, or dazzled by the splendour of military achievement, to tolerate its excesses and palliate its crimes. Meanwhile, till that period arrived, he welcomed the advent of the people's triumphs with enthusiastic faith and joy.

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven!

He took his degree in January 1791, and in November of the same year we find him returning to France, which he did not again quit till the close of the following year. A considerable portion of this period he spent at Orleans and Blois. His most intimate friend was General Beaupuis, whose character as philosopher, patriot, and soldier, was eminently calculated to attract the admiration of a young and ardent poetic mind. How deep was the impression made upon him during these eventful months, and how keenly he sympathised with each new phase of the popular movement, is stamped alike upon his earlier and later poems; and manifests itself equally in the glowing passion of his hopes, and in the indignant bitterness of his disapppointment. A purer passion never warmed the heart of patriot or poet.

It was probably fortunate for him that circumstances—we presume the want of money—compelled him to return to England at the close of the year, as he was intimately connected with the Brissotins, and might have shared their destruction, had he stayed till the following May. 'William,' says his sister, in a letter of the 22nd December, 1792, 'is in London; he writes to me regularly, and is a most affectionate brother.'

The extent to which his political opinions were at this time identified with the principles of the French Revolution, may be gathered from an unpublished pamphlet, entitled, 'A Letter to the Bishop of Landaff on the political principles contained in an Appendix to one of his lordship's recent Sermons,' and from a letter to a friend named Matthews. He disapproves of hereditary monarchy, hereditary distinctions and privileged orders of every species, as necessarily counteracting the progress of human improvement; and holds that even social privileges and distinctions should be conferred by the elective voice of the people. He emphatically declares himself not an admirer of the British constitution. Yet, he adds—

In my ardour to attain the goal, I do not forget the nature of the ground where the race is to be run. The destruction of those institutions which I condemn, appears to me to be

hastening on too rapidly. *I recoil from the very idea of a revolution.* I am a determined enemy to every species of violence. I see no connexion, but what the obstinacy of pride and ignorance renders necessary, between justice and the sword,—between reason and bonds. I deplore the miserable condition of the French, and think that *we* can only be guarded from the same scourge by the undaunted efforts of good men.....I severely condemn all inflammatory addresses to the passions of men. I know that the multitude walk in darkness. I would put into each man's hand a lantern, to guide him; and not have him to set out upon his journey depending for illumination on abortive flashes of lightning, or the coruscations of transitory meteors.

With principles so decidedly republican, and sentiments so opposed to violence, physical force, or even inflammatory agitation; with such a clear consciousness of the necessity of knowledge and virtue, as the only basis and safeguard of popular liberties, a clear-sighted observer might even thus early have anticipated the course of Wordsworth's opinions on the French Revolution, and on politics, practical and speculative, in general. The immediate effect of his disappointment was to cloud his hopes and weaken his faith in human nature; and his painful feelings were still farther embittered, and clashing sympathies jarred the more harshly within him, when, in consequence of the execution of Louis XVI., this country declared war against France. During the year 1793, he published the

poems entitled *The Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, the latter of which he had composed principally in his walks along the banks of the Loire the preceding summer. Interesting as these poems are in themselves, as the first-fruits of an original genius, they are more important as having in the following year attracted the attention of Coleridge, then an undergraduate at Cambridge, and having thus laid the foundations of an intimacy which exercised a powerful influence upon these two great men, and contributed to enrich and expand their minds, no less than it ministered to the enjoyments of both. 'Seldom, if ever,' says Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria*, 'was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced.' But poetry can never be counted on as a means of support; and hitherto Wordsworth had been almost wholly dependent on his relations, the debt to his father's estate from Lord Lonsdale not having been yet recovered. He was therefore urged to make choice of a profession; or rather, the Church was pointed out as the only one open to him. In spite, however, of remonstrating relatives and an empty purse, he resolved not to take orders. The consequence naturally was, that relatives from remonstrance turned to indignation and coldness, and the purse was not likely to fill

itself. As a means of accomplishing this desirable object, he proposed to his friend Matthews, then engaged on a London newspaper, to join him in a monthly periodical, to be called the *Philanthropist*, the principles of which were to be republican but not revolutionary. He was himself to contribute to it criticisms on poetry, painting, gardening, &c., besides essays on morals and politics. The scheme, however, came to nothing, and his next attempt was to secure employment on a London paper, only conditioning that it should be an opposition one; 'for,' says he, 'I cannot abet, in the smallest degree, the measures pursued by the present ministry'; adding, at the same time, 'I know that many good men are persuaded of the expediency of the present war.' He was at this time engaged in attendance on the sick-bed of a young friend, Raisley Calvert, who was dying of consumption. Before the newspaper engagement was actually concluded, this young man (who was wise enough to discern Wordsworth's genius, and was impressed with the persuasion that, if not impeded by the necessity of other occupations, he would benefit mankind by his writings) died, and left to his friend the sum of nine hundred pounds. Thus relieved from all immediate care, he gave himself entirely to his poetic impulse, and devoted himself with unswerving aim and untiring energy

to what he felt to be his appointed task. This bold step was justified, not only by the clearness of purpose and consciousness of power which prompted it, but by the abstemious habits and simple tastes which are so often wanting in poets. Writing some time afterwards to Sir George Beaumont, he says, 'Upon the interest of the £900, £400 being laid out in annuity, with £200 deducted from the principal, and £100 legacy to my sister, and a £100 more which the *Lyrical Ballads* have brought me, my sister and I contrived to live seven years—nearly eight.' People who can so live may follow the promptings of genius without the imputation of folly, rashness, or vain self-confidence. The legacy came to Wordsworth in the early part of 1795, and in the autumn of that year, he and his sister, who thenceforth was his constant companion, were settled at Racedown Lodge, near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire. It was here that he composed the imitations of Juvenal, alluded to before, and the tragedy of the *Borderers*, which, after being offered to Mr. Harris, the manager of Covent Garden, and by him declined, remained in MS. till the year 1842. Wordsworth assigns it to his sister's benign influence upon him during this period, that he was saved from lasting despondency, consequent upon the failure of his political hopes. Depressed in

heart, bewildered in intellect, in danger even of letting slip the great saving truths of Reason, and taking refuge in abstract Science from the scoffing spirit by which a man revenges himself on his own delusions, he thanks

> The bounteous Giver of all good,
> That the beloved sister in whose sight
> Those days were passed * *
> * * * *
> Maintained for me a saving intercourse
> With my true self * *
> * * * *
> She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
> A poet, made me seek beneath that name,
> And that alone, my office upon earth.

How complete was the recovery of the poet under the humanising and tranquillising influence of this loving and beloved sister, is seen from an interesting passage in the *Biographia Literaria*. Speaking of his residence at Stowey, Coleridge says, 'I was so fortunate as to acquire, shortly after my settlement there, an invaluable blessing in the society and neighbourhood of one to whom I could look up with equal reverence, whether I regarded him as a poet, a philosopher, or a man. His conversation extended to almost all subjects, except physics and politics; *with the latter he never troubled himself.*' A short time previous to the removal of Wordsworth

and his sister to Alfoxden, in the neighbourhood of Stowey, mentioned in the above passage, Coleridge had paid them a visit at Racedown; and in a letter from that place to Cottle, he says of Wordsworth, —'I speak with heartfelt sincerity, and I think unblinded judgment, when I tell you that I feel a little man by his side.' Miss Wordsworth he describes to the same friend in terms of warm and eloquent admiration:

> She is a woman indeed, in mind, I mean, and in heart; for her person is such that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her ordinary; if you expected to see an ordinary woman you would think her pretty, but her manners are simple, ardent, impressive. In every motion her innocent soul out-beams so brightly, that who saw her would say, 'Guilt was a thing impossible with her.' Her information various; her eye watchful in minutest observation of Nature; and her taste a perfect electrometer.

On the side of the Wordsworths the impression made by Coleridge was equally favourable, and their removal to Alfoxden was mainly induced by their desire to enjoy his society. The residence at Alfoxden commenced in July 1797, and the twelvemonth that he passed there he describes as 'a very pleasant and productive time of his life.' Indeed, in that year, with the exception of the *Female Vagrant*, all the poems contained in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* were composed. To the same

period *Peter Bell* is due, though it was not published till 1819. How the *Lyrical Ballads* were a joint projection of Wordsworth and Coleridge—the aim with which they were written—the principles which dictated their choice of subjects and style of diction—and how Coleridge was not so industrious as his coadjutor—and that the book was finally published by Cottle of Bristol, in the summer of 1798, in a duodecimo volume—moreover, that the reviews were terribly severe, and that of five hundred copies the greater number were sold as remainder at a loss, are all stale topics to the readers of the *Biographia Literaria* and Cottle's *Reminiscences.* Wordsworth received thirty guineas for his share of the copyright, which was, with Mr. Cottle's other literary property, subsequently transferred to Messrs. Longman, who estimating this particular article at *nil*, returned it, at Mr. Cottle's request, and it was by him presented to the authors. This, it must be confessed, was a singular reception for a volume which, however the public taste was repelled by some of its contents, yet gave to the light Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and *Nightingale,* with Wordsworth's *Lines left upon a Yew tree seat* and *Tintern Abbey,*—four poems, of which it is not too much to say, that since Milton's voice had ceased, such noble strains had not been uttered in English speech. The

famous Preface, to which Coleridge justly, we think, attributes much of the acrimony with which the Lake-school of poetry, as it came afterwards to be called, was assailed, was not published till the *Lyrical Ballads* reached a second edition, and were augmented by an additional volume; so that the public neglect and the severity of the critics must be explained by the poems themselves, and not by revolutionary views of poetic composition, systematically and, it must be owned, somewhat dogmatically announced. These views, and the productions which were the result of them, have been the subject of controversy and discussion from that time to this; the ablest critics and the greatest poets have borne part in it. The issue may, we think, be fairly stated to be, that the theory, considered as polemic in reference to the style of poetry of which Pope's translation of Homer is the type and highest example, is perfectly successful and generally received; that the agitation to which it gave rise has had great influence in winning men back to perceive the material that lies ready for the poet's use in our actual daily life, and, as a necessary consequence, to bring poetic language nearer to the actual phraseology of human beings in a state of passion or vivid emotion; but that, on the other hand, the theory was wanting both in comprehensiveness of knowledge, in subtlety of analysis

and catholicity of taste—that, in a word, it was little more than polemic; while the poems composed expressly to support, or at least under the definite and conscious influence of the theory, are just those in which Wordsworth falls farthest below himself, and which, even now that his name is honoured by the wise and good, and his seat is among the immortals, are regarded by all but a very few, and those for the most part persons who were in some way connected with him, as experiments which, though they in no wise detract from his fame, have added no laurel to his wreath. In fact, the best refutation of Mr. Wordsworth's theory, considered as anything more than a corrective of an excess in the opposite direction, is furnished by those poems of his own, in which he follows the natural bent of his genius, unwarped by system—that is, in at least nine-tenths of his published works. And there, whether it be the play of the fancy, the overflow of affection, the visionary power of imagination, or the reason's rapture of intuition, that colours his mental activity and stirs his heart and tongue, the matter is the life-stuff of a great original genius, and the language and versification such as speak the faculty and the education of an artist. Mr. Coleridge puts the matter in its simplest form, when he says of *Alice Fell* and other kindred poems,—'Notwithstanding

the beauties which are to be found in each of them, where the poet interposes the music of his own thoughts, they would have been more delightful to me in prose, told and managed as by Mr. Wordsworth they would have been, in a moral essay or pedestrian tour.' These last words were penned doubtless in the vivid recollection of many pedestrian tours, in which the two poets were accompanied by the beloved sister, who was almost equally dear to them both; and who, in addition to her charms of mind and heart, was

> Fleet and strong;
> And down the rocks could leap along,
> Like rivulets in May.

No one can doubt that the exquisite poem from which these lines are taken, and which the doctor-lawyer-coroner-editor Pangloss, who does not represent Finsbury, secured himself from wholesome oblivion by ridiculing in the House of Commons, is a portrait of Dorothy Wordsworth. The brother's description may help us to feel what a pedestrian tour with such a companion must have been:

> And she hath smiles to earth unknown;
> Smiles, that with motion of their own
> Do spread, and sink, and rise;
> That come and go with endless play,
> And ever as they pass away
> Are hidden in her eyes.

Well, the *Lyrical Ballads* were published in July 1798; and a superfluity of cash being thus obtained, the trio started in September following for Germany, but separated at Hamburg, Coleridge proceeding in one direction by himself, and the brother and sister taking up their residence at Goslar. The only person of eminence whom the Wordsworths seem to have been introduced to was Klopstock, that 'very German Milton' who is recorded as talking like an 'Erz-Philister'; the substance of the conversation is published in that portion of the *Biographia Literaria* called 'Satyrane's Letters.' They spent some months at Goslar, but from one cause or other, partly Wordsworth's dislike of smoke, partly that the presence of his sister would, according to the notions of the place, have bound him to entertain company if he accepted invitations, which his finances prevented him from doing—from these or other causes, they failed to see much of German society, and spent their time in learning the language by reading and casual conversation. Upon the whole, we can point to no specific fruits of this residence abroad in Wordsworth's writings; while, on the other hand, Coleridge derived from it a knowledge of German philosophy and literature which coloured the whole of his after-life, and mainly, though not entirely, in consequence of which he is looked on by

many as the angel who has come down and troubled the waters of English speculative science, so that they who bathe therein derive from them healing and strength. But even while he was in Germany, Wordsworth's heart was in England; and it was to English scenes and home recollections that his poems of this period refer; except one lamentably heavy attempt at being funny. *Nutting*, well worthy of being considered a pendant to *Tintern Abbey*,—the two noble poems afterwards incorporated with the *Prelude*, *Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe*, and *There was a boy, ye knew him well, ye cliffs*,—the stanzas to Lucy, *She dwelt amid the untrodden ways*,'' so tender and graceful, sad holy, and beautiful as a Madonna,—those others, *Three years she grew in sun and shower*, the most exquisite description ever written of an English country girl, half child, half woman, with the wildness and witchery of a sylphide, the grace of a duchess, and the purity of an angel,—the poet's Epitaph, containing those lines, so often applied to himself,

> He is retired as noon-tide dew,
> Or fountain in a noon-day grove;
> And you must love him, ere to you
> He will seem worthy of your love;—

these and others of his poems less popular, he

composed during that winter at Goslar, the severest, it is said, of the whole century. But they might have been composed just as well anywhere else; and neither in the records of this winter, nor in the poems themselves, nor in any after results, is the influence of this Goslar residence apparent. It was as he left Goslar that 'he poured forth the impassioned strain which forms the commencement of the *Prelude*.' This was on the 10th February, 1799; and of the fourteen books, six only had been written in 1805, and the seventh, begun in the spring of that year, opens thus:

> Six changeful years have vanished, since I first
> Poured out (saluted by that quick'ning breeze
> Which met me issuing from the city's walls)
> A glad preamble to this verse.

He writes to Cottle on his return, 'We have spent our time pleasantly enough in Germany, but we are right glad to find ourselves in England, for we have learnt to know its value.'

Wordsworth had now reached his thirtieth year, when his training may be presumed complete. His tastes, his pursuits, and his character, were fully determined, and the remainder of his life, extending over a space of fifty years, was but the progressive manifestation of the powers cultivated, and the principles formed, during the stages of which we have

been hitherto speaking. In the latter part of 1799 he took up his residence with his sister, in a cottage at Grasmere; and here, or at a house called Allan Bank, and subsequently at Rydal Mount, he passed his long, peaceful, and happy existence in a round of domestic charities and poetic activity.

The following extracts from Miss Wordsworth's journal we quote, as the best account we can give of the daily life of the writer and her brother:

Wednesday, April 28.—Copied the *Prioress' Tale.* W. in the orchard—tired. I happened to say that when a child I would not have pulled *a strawberry blossom:* left him, and wrote out the *Manciple's tale.* At dinner he came in with the poem on children gathering flowers.*

April 30.—We went into the orchard after breakfast, and sat there. The lake calm, sky cloudy. W. began poem on the *Celandine.*

May 1.—Sowed flower seeds: W. helped me. We sat in the orchard. W. wrote the *Celandine.* Planned an arbour: the sun too hot for us.

May 7.—W. wrote the *Leech-Gatherer.*

May 21.—W. wrote two sonnets on *Buonaparte* after I had read Milton's Sonnets to him.

May 29.—W. wrote his Poem on going to M. H. I wrote it out.

June 8.—W. wrote the poem *The sun has long been set.*

June 17.—W. added to the *Ode*† he is writing.

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* The poem entitled *Foresight* (vol. i. p. 149).

† *On Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Childhood* (vol. v. p. 148).

June 19.—Read Churchill's *Rosciad.*

July 9.—W. and I set forth to Keswick on our road to Gallow Hill (to the Hutchinsons, near Malton, York). On Monday, 11th, went to Eusemere (the Clarksons). 13th, walked to Emont Bridge, thence by Greta Bridge. The sun shone cheerfully, and a glorious ride we had over the moors; every building bathed in golden light: we saw round us miles beyond miles, Darlington spire, &c. Thence to Thirsk; on foot to the Hambledon Hills—Rivaulx. I went down to look at the ruins; thrushes singing, cattle feeding among the ruins of the Abbey; green hillocks about the ruins; these hillocks scattered over with *grovelets* of wild roses, and covered with wild flowers. I could have stayed in this solemn quiet spot till evening without a thought of moving, but W. was waiting for me.

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July 30.—Left London between five and six o'clock of the morning outside the Dover coach. A beautiful morning. The city, St. Paul's, with the river—a multitude of little boats, made a beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge;* the houses not overhung by their clouds of smoke, and were spread out endlessly; yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a pure light, that there was something like the purity of one of Nature's own grand spectacles.....Arrived at *Calais* at four in the morning of July 31st.

Delightful walks in the evenings; seeing far off in the west the coast of England, like a cloud, crested with Dover Castle, the evening star, and the glory of the sky: the reflections in the water were more beautiful than the sky itself; purple waves brighter than precious stones for ever melting away upon the sands.

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* The Sonnet on Westminster Bridge was then written on the roof of the Dover coach (vol. ii. p. 296).

On Monday, Oct. 4, 1802, W. was married at Brompton Church to Mary Hutchinson.....We arrived at Grasmere at six in the evening on Oct. 6, 1802.

Mary Hutchinson was Wordsworth's cousin, and they had been intimate from childhood, having been at the same dame's school together, whenever the poet, during his earliest years, was on a visit to his maternal relations at Penrith. How calm and beautiful their wedded life was; how full of mutual support and happiness; how rich in thoughtful affection, esteem, and purifying influence, may be traced in the poems with which Mrs. Wordsworth's name will ever be more directly associated, forming a series to which the sameness of subject, and the progressive development of feeling, give a unity which shapes them into an organic whole, one sweet and holy poem of wedded love, reflecting the vicissitudes of earthly life, as the mountain-circled lake reflects the changing face of an April sky, bright or overcast, as clouds or sunshine prevail above; but whether in brightness or in gloom, calm in its still depths, however the breeze may ruffle and perplex the mirror of its surface.

We are indebted to Mr. de Quincey for portraits of Wordsworth and his wife, which, in the absence of anything of the sort in Dr. Christopher Wordsworth's volumes, we will take the liberty to present in an abridged form; though whatever Mr. de Quincey

writes is so admirable, that no abridgment can fail to do it injustice. He describes Mrs. Wordsworth, a few years after her marriage, as a tall young woman, with the most winning expression of benignity upon her features that he had ever beheld, and with such a frank air, and native goodness of manner, as at once to put a stranger at his ease with her. Her figure was good, though rather slender: her complexion fair, and blooming with an animated expression of health. Her eyes, as her husband paints her,

> Like stars of twilight fair;
> Like twilights, too, her dusky hair;
> But all things else about her drawn
> From May-time and the cheerful dawn.

Mr. de Quincey adds to his portrait that in these eyes of vesper gentleness there was more than that slight obliquity of vision which is often supposed to be an attractive foible of the countenance; and yet, though it ought to have been displeasing or repulsive, in fact it was not. 'Indeed, all faults, had they been ten times more and greater, would have been swallowed up, or neutralised, by that supreme expression of her features, to the intense unity of which every lineament in the fixed parts, and every undulation in the moving parts, or play of her countenance, concurred—viz. a sunny benignity,

a radiant gracefulness, such as in this world I never saw equalled or approached.' He tells us that, 'though generally pronounced very plain, she exercised all the practical power and fascination of beauty through the mere compensating charms of sweetness all but angelic; of simplicity the most entire; womanly self-respect, and purity of heart speaking through all their looks, acts, and movements.' She talked so little, that Clarkson used to say to her, that she could only say, 'God bless you!'

A masterly portrait is completed by a description of the intellectual character as not being of an active order; though, 'in a quiescent, reposing, meditative way, she appeared always to have a genial enjoyment from her own thoughts.' The acknowledged pique which colours all Mr. de Quincey's picture of the Wordsworths may have had something to do with this last touch. Our readers will scarcely be disposed to agree with any depreciation of that woman's intellect who wrote the two most beautiful and thoughtful lines in one of Wordsworth's most charming minor poems. It is to Mrs. Wordsworth that the poem called *Daffodils* owes the lines—

> They flash upon that inward eye,
> Which is the bliss of solitude.

Such was the woman who for nearly fifty years shared the home and heart of the poet with the beloved sister. And what was he like himself? Let us take a crayon sketch from the full-length carefully coloured portrait, by the same skilful hand. He was five feet ten inches in height, and of moderate stoutness, but his legs were bad, and his bust worse, from a narrowness of chest, and a droop about the shoulders. These defects of figure were more conspicuous when he was in motion, and were increased by a habit he had of walking with his arm in his unbuttoned waistcoat, which caused him to advance with a twisting motion, so that he would gradually edge off any one he was with, from the middle to the side of the road, and the country people used to say he walked 'like a cade,' some sort of insect with an oblique motion. He had originally a fine sombre complexion, like that of a Venetian senator, or a Spanish monk; but constant exposure to weather soon spoilt his tint, and gave a coarse texture to his face, and grizzled hair came early to displace the original brown. His countenance, however, made amends for figure and complexion; 'it was,' says the artist we are copying, 'the noblest for intellectual effects that I have ever been led to notice.' It had the character of a portrait of Titian, or Vandyke, of the great age of Elizabeth and the

Stuarts. Haydon has painted Wordsworth as a disciple, in his picture of 'Christ's Entry into Jerusalem.' The head was well filled out; the forehead not very lofty, but remarkable for its breadth and expansive development. The eyes were rather small, and never lustrous or piercing, but at times, especially after long walks, 'assumed an appearance the most solemn and spiritual that it is possible for the human eye to wear.' The light that resided in them, though never superficial, seemed at times 'to come from depths below all depths,' 'the light that never was on land or sea.' The nose was a little arched and large. But the most marked feature in the whole face was the mouth; the swell and protrusion of the parts above and around it were not only noticeable in themselves, but gave the face a striking resemblance to the portrait of Milton, engraved in Richardson the painter's notes on *Paradise Lost*, which was the only one acknowledged by Milton's last surviving daughter to be a strong likeness of her father. Every member of Wordsworth's family was as much impressed as Mr. de Quincey with the striking resemblance. The points of difference were, that Milton's face was shorter and broader, and his eyes larger. The only portrait of Wordsworth which Mr. de Quincey thinks is to be at all compared for likeness with this Richardson-portrait of Milton, is that by

Caruthers, with one of the Rydal waterfalls for a background. The objection to the later portraits is, that Wordsworth, from the fervour of his temperament, and the self-consuming energy of his brain, prematurely displayed the appearance of age.

We make no apology for the length to which these descriptions have run; rather, we heartily recommend our readers to study the originals, not less for Wordsworth's sake, than as admirable specimens of one of the greatest prose writers whom our century has produced. They will be found in *Tait's Magazine*, among the *Lake Reminiscences*, by the English Opium-Eater.

In the year 1800, an edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, with an additional volume, and the famous Preface, had been published. Fresh editions were called for in the years 1802 and 1805, proof sufficient that the fit audience was already gathering strength, and that the reviewers were not the public. Still the returns scarcely did more than pay the expense of publication. This, however, was now of less importance. In 1802, on the death of the first Lord Lonsdale, his successor had paid the debt due to Wordsworth's family with interest, and the sum that fell to each member was about £1800. Mr. de Quincey, with something of good-humoured banter, and a half-serious latent reference to his own different

fate, speaks of Wordsworth, in reference to pecuniary matters, as the most fortunate man in existence; and tells us that a regular succession of god-sends fell in to sustain his expenditure with the growing claims upon his purse. We have mentioned the legacy from Raisley Calvert, which saved him from newspaper writing, and (though his nephew seems to know nothing about it) from the equally unsuitable employment of taking pupils. Next came Lord Lonsdale's repayment, which enabled him to marry; for with his simple habits, what would have been poverty to most men of education was a competence for him. Miss Hutchinson brought him some fortune, which was afterwards increased by a legacy from an uncle expressed in thousands of pounds. In 1813, just as his family were becoming expensive, he was made stamp-distributor for Westmoreland, with an income of above £500 per annum—not to mention the subsequent addition to this source of income from the increase of his district, which Mr. de Quincey estimates at £400 more; and finally (since Mr. de Quincey wrote), on resigning this office in 1842, it was bestowed upon his younger son, and he was himself put down upon the civil list for £300 a year, and, to crown all, made Poet Laureate ;* so that,

* Dr. Wordsworth is not quite correct in leading his readers to suppose that his uncle's laureateship was a complete

by a singular felicity, this man, unpossessed of any marketable talent, was enabled, from the age of three-and-twenty, to devote himself, without care or anxiety for the future, to the cultivation of his genius, and was secured in that free enjoyment of nature and domestic happiness, which was an essential condition of his poetic activity. To Raisley Calvert, who laid the first stone, and to Lord Lonsdale, who first by a prompt and liberal act of justice, and afterwards by a kind and discerning act of patronage, built upon this foundation the solid edifice of the poet's prosperity, be all honour paid. The name and virtues of both are embalmed for immortality in those pages, which owe so much to the leisure their liberality and discernment fortified; but England owes them a debt of gratitude, which she will pay, in proportion as her people feel 'what a glorious gift God bestows on a nation when he gives them a poet.'* It would be unfair to Sir George Beaumont not to associate his name with Wordsworth's benefactors. Before he had seen Wordsworth,

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sinecure. On Prince Albert's installation as Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, he wrote the words of the Ode, which was composed by the popular and accomplished professor of music, Dr. Walmisley, and performed in the Senate House.

* Dedication of second edition of *Guesses at Truth* to W. Wordsworth.

solely from the impression made upon him by his writings, he, in 1803, purchased a beautiful spot at Applethwaite, near Keswick, and presented it to the poet, in order that he and Coleridge, who was then residing at Greta-hall, might be permanent neighbours. Coleridge's failure of health compelled him to leave England, and the plan was never carried out; but the friendship that sprang from this beginning ripened into a close intimacy and a frequent interchange of letters and visits. Some of the happiest efforts of the titled painter are illustrations of the poems of his friend; and in many of those poems their names will go down to posterity, linked together by the purest ties of friendship and mutual admiration. Sir George died in 1827, and bequeathed to Mr. Wordsworth an annuity of £100 to defray the expenses of an annual tour. There had been a period in Wordsworth's life, when fear of poverty and distress had clouded his prospects. Mr. de Quincey informs us, on Miss Worthsworth's authority, that her brother at one time became subject to a nervous affection to such an extent, that his friends, as a means of beguiling his distress, played cards with him every night.

Again we say, honour and gratitude to Raisley Calvert and Lord Lonsdale, and the few men who, like Sir George Beaumont, cheered and supported

the poet in his struggle with hostile criticism and public apathy. To these three men his works and his correspondence bear ample testimony. We cannot however, in justice, avoid a passing allusion to the absence of any acknowledgment, or of even any feeling of thankfulness, for sympathy of a less substantial but no less necessary kind from those few men of letters who early discerned and expressed their sense of Wordsworth's profoundly original genius. If the poet's own extreme dislike of writing prevented such acknowledgments in the shape in which they form so pleasing a portion of the biographies of other poets, at least we should like to have had some record of spoken feelings, which would have shewn that the homage of such men as Wilson and de Quincey, and later in his career, of Thomas Arnold, of Julius Hare, and of Henry Taylor, was not paid to an idol of stone. The biographer's want of sympathy with any form of goodness or talent which does not run submissively within the channels of Church-of-England orthodoxy according to the Westminster Canon, may partly account for this. Still something of it must, we fear, be attributed to a hardness in Wordsworth's nature towards the human world outside his own family circle, to an independence of the sympathy of men, which was indeed a means of preserving him from much discomfort

and annoyance, assailed and ridiculed as he was, but which, at the same time, was grievously discouraging to such worshippers as felt the worth of their worship, and required some return of affection, sympathy, and esteem. With men of letters especially, the 'limitation of his literary sensibilities' prevented him from forming, or at least sustaining, a mutual friendship. Even to Coleridge, who so dearly loved him, who so generously and so ably vindicated his claims to be called a great poet, whose profound and elaborate criticism in the *Biographia Literaria* remains to this day the most satisfactory defence and the best exposition of his friend's poetry, how small the return of affectionate, admiring appreciation—how dim and faint the sympathy during all that period of Coleridge's life, when clouds and darkness beset his path, and he was walking through the valley of the shadow of death! The fact is, he did not value all this sympathy, because he did not need it. He could never have written to Coleridge as Coleridge wrote to him in Germany—

> William, my head and my heart! dear William and dear Dorothea!
> *You have all in each other; but I am lonely, and want you!*

This last line, too, gives a more amiable reason for Wordsworth's indifference to his friends and

admirers. His heart was wrapped up in his wife and sister, and afterwards in his children, especially in her who recalled his sister's childhood—his beloved Dora. The name recals us from our discursion to speak of one in whom so much of the poet's deepest, fondest affection was centred, and to whom his biographer has paid the honour of joining her portrait with her father's as the frontispieces to his two volumes. Wordsworth had in all five children:

John, born 18th June, 1803.

Dorothy, called and generally known as Dora, born 16th August, 1804.

Thomas, born 16th June, 1806.

Catharine, born 6th Sept. 1808.

William, born 12th May, 1810.

Of these, Thomas and Catharine died in early childhood; John and William survive their father; the former is a clergyman, the latter succeeded upon his father's resignation to the distributorship of stamps. Nothing remarkable is recorded of any of the four by Dr. Christopher Wordsworth; but to those for whom curious psychological facts have interest, the name of Catharine Wordsworth (who died before she was four years old; 'loving she is, and tractable, though wild,' is addressed to her) will always be memorable as the cause and object of that strange nympholepsy, the agonies of which Mr. de

Quincey has so graphically and powerfully described in those *Lake Reminiscences*, to which the absence of what is interesting or characteristic in the volumes we are reviewing has led us so often to refer. Dora Wordsworth will always form a conspicuous object in any artistically conceived biography of her father. When she was a month old, he addressed to her that thoughtful poem, beginning,

> Hast thou, then, survived,
> Mild offspring of infirm humanity?

Not many weeks after, she inspired that most exquisite of all her father's sportive compositions, *The Kitten and the Falling Leaves*. To her is addressed *The Longest Day*; and when, threatened with blindness, he anticipates the time that he should need a guiding hand, it is to his 'own Dora, his beloved child,' that he would, like another Œdipus, entrust his dark steps. And who can forget that later group, in which the noblest art, warmed by pure affection, has blended together in indissoluble beauty, Dora Wordsworth, Edith Southey, and Sara Coleridge? She married at a mature age Edward Quillinan, Esq.,* to whose children, left to her charge

* We regret to be compelled to add that, since this article was written, the newspapers have announced the death of this gentleman, himself the author of works which prove him to have been worthy of his charming and gifted wife.

by a beloved friend, she had performed the duties of a mother. But her health rapidly failed, and after an unavailing journey to Portugal, of which she has left a published record that proves her to have inherited no little of the genius of her father and her aunt, she died of consumption in July, 1847, about three years before her father. From the poems addressed to her, and those previously alluded to, referring to Mrs. Wordsworth, with the scattered allusions throughout his works to his sister, the reader may have insight into Wordsworth's life, so far as women influenced either his happiness or the development of his genius. His *Lucy* poems, which seem to allude to some early love prematurely removed, either belong to the region of pure imagination, or all records of the fact have been obliterated. But the sister, the wife, and the daughter remain for us as prominent portraits, scarcely idealised by the poet's pencil, as fellow-workers co-operating in the production of the poems, and above all, as personal powers, sustaining, nourishing, purifying, and invigorating the poetic temperament by the sweet and holy influences of affection, and the quiet, unobtrusive action of the domestic charities. The history of literature furnishes no group upon which the heart can rest more delighted and satisfied.

We have noticed Wordsworth's successive publi-

cations up to 1805. In 1807 appeared two volumes of Miscellaneous Poems, which drew down upon him the wrath and ridicule of Mr. Jeffrey. The great oracle of the North had before this given vent to sundry manifestations of indignant contempt, but our poet had hitherto stood the brunt of the critic's charge in company with Southey, Lamb, and the rest of the so-called Lakers. But now on his single head was discharged the pitiless pelting of the storm; and while the majority of the world were shaking with laughter, and a few trembling with indignation, the unhappy victim himself maintained an unbroken serenity, and held on his way with cheerful heart and hope unabated. God has given to some men love, humility, and genuine appreciation of the beautiful and the good in nature and in art; to others, the gift of saying witty things and being ill-natured. What could such a critic, with all his brilliant faculties, permanently effect against a man who writes with the views and expectations expressed in the following passage from a letter, dated 1807, to Lady Beaumont:

At present let me confine myself to my object, which *is* to make you, my dear friend, as easy-hearted as myself with respect to these poems. Trouble not yourself upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny?—*to* console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the

young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform, long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves.

Still, the critic did something; he supplied wit-lings with epigrammatic bon-bons, caused the poems to be an unremunerative article of commerce, and retarded the nation in their general acknowledgment of a great poet; and they now stand side by side, critic and poet, and the age has already approximated to a just appreciation of each. Again, on the publication of the *Excursion*, in 1814, the same hand shot another and a more sulphurous bolt; he even boasted, in his self-complacent blindness, that he had crushed the *Excursion*. 'He crush the *Excursion*!' cried Southey; 'tell him he might as well hope to crush Skiddaw!' But this time, whether from mere opposition, or from a gleam of genuine insight, the *Quarterly Review*—established, a few years previously, as a counterblast to the great Whig Bellows—issued a mild whiff of qualified approval. This, however, was going too far; and next year, in a notice of the *White Doe of Rylstone*, 'Wordsworth stood at the bar of the Tory journal, arraigned and convicted of poetical heterodoxy and literary *felo-de-se*.' Nor—in spite of Southey's intimate connexion

with the *Quarterly*, and his invaluable assistance to it—was the verdict reversed till, in 1834, the author of *Philip Van Artevelde* contributed to its pages the ablest estimate and the fullest acknowledgment of Wordsworth's genius and poetry that has appeared since the publication of the *Biographia Literaria*. That still remains, and is likely, we fear, long to remain, unapproached and unapproachable, as a specimen of philosophical criticism, and a generous testimony of personal admiration.

Instructive as are these facts, as warnings against putting faith in critics, and against that self-conceit and laziness which presume to judge a writer who gives ample proof of original genius, without an attempt to submit to his influence, or to seize his point of view, and so feel with his feelings and see with his eyes, we should not think them worth mentioning here, but for the serene equanimity with which Wordsworth endured, not only the lash of his critics, but, what is far more galling, the neglect of the world of letters. 'Let the age,' he writes to Southey, 'continue to love its own darkness; I shall continue to write with, I trust, the light of Heaven upon me.' With more epigrammatic point than is usual with him, he says of one of his principal assailants, 'he has taken a perpetual retainer from his own incapacity to plead against my claims to

public approbation.' So again, in writing to Bernard Barton: 'It pleases, though it does not surprise me, to learn that, having been affected early in life by my verses, you have returned again to your old loves, after some little infidelities, which you were shamed into by commerce with the scribbling and chattering part of the world. I have heard of many who, upon their first acquaintance with my poetry, have had much to get over before they could thoroughly relish it; but never of one who, having once learned to enjoy it, had ceased to value it, or survived his admiration. This is as good an external assurance as I can desire, that my inspiration is from a pure source, and that my principles of composition are trustworthy.'

It was this rooted conviction of the genuineness of his inspiration and the truth of his principles, combined with a deep sense that the question involved was not a merely personal one to himself, but concerned the best interests of humanity, that sustained his patience and cheerfulness. But subordinate to this moral cause, we have no doubt that his active habits and out-of-door life materially aided this effect. 'Nine-tenths of my verses,' he says, 'have been murmured in the open air.' 'There,' said his servant to some strangers, who were being shown over Rydal Mount, 'is my master's *library*, where

he keeps his books, but his study is out of doors.' And on his return after a long absence from home, his cottage neighbours have been heard to say, 'Well, there he is; we are glad to hear him *booing* about again.' His pedestrian tours have been already mentioned; and, indeed, his tours seem to have been most of them mainly pedestrian; it is not from carriage-windows that such impressions as form the stuff of his numerous poetic memorials of his journeys to Scotland and elsewhere are received. How much his happiness was subserved by this habit, may be judged from an anecdote, shewing the extreme irritability of his constitution, which was further manifested in frequently recurring attacks of inflammation of the eyes. He received a wound in his foot while walking about composing the *White Doe*, and though he desisted from walking, he found the irritation of the wounded part was kept up by the act of composition. Upon taking a mental holiday, a rapid cure was the consequence. He adds, 'Poetic excitement, when accompanied by protracted labour in composition, has throughout my life brought on more or less bodily derangement. Nevertheless, I am, at the close of my seventy-third year, in what may be called excellent health. But I ought to add, that my intellectual labour has been generally carried on out of doors.' Not that his poems were

given to the public as extempore effusions; no writer of his time was more impressed with the necessity of labour for the perfect poet. He thus writes to a friend who seemed destined to tread the path of science with honour and usefulness, and was in danger of weakening himself by indulgence in the composition of verses:

> Again and again I must repeat, that the composition of verse is infinitely more of an *art* than men are prepared to believe; and absolute success in it depends upon innumerable minutiæ, which it grieves me you should stoop to acquire a knowledge of. Milton talks of 'pouring easy his unpremeditated verse.' It would be harsh, untrue, and odious, to say there is anything like cant in this; but it is not *true* to the letter, and tends to mislead. I could point out to you five hundred passages in Milton upon which labour has been bestowed, and twice five hundred more to which additional labour would have been serviceable.

Mr. de Quincey calculated many years ago, that Wordsworth's legs must have carried him then nearly 200,000 miles; and an old friend of ours is fond of telling that as he was riding one summer afternoon on a coach along Grasmere, the coach met Mr. Wordsworth, and stopped; and a young lady inside, who was going on a visit to the poet, put her head out to speak to him. 'How d' ye do?' said he; 'how d' ye do? Mrs. Wordsworth will be delighted to see you. I shall be back in the evening.

I'm only going to tea with Southey.' Southey lived not less than fifteen miles off; hardly a yard of level ground all the way. Another anecdote we must tell, partly illustrating this peripatetic tendency, and partly as giving a glimpse of that practical humour, which Wordsworth was not deficient in, though these volumes furnish but this solitary one, and that is owing to Mr. Justice Coleridge.

As we walked, I was admiring the never-ceasing sound of water, so remarkable in this country. "I was walking," he said," on the mountains, with —— the Eastern traveller; it was after rain, and the torrents were full. I said, 'I hope you like your companions—these bounding, joyous, foaming streams.' 'No,' said the traveller, pompously, 'I think they are not to be compared in delightful effect with the silent solitude of the Arabian Desert.' My mountain blood was up. I quickly observed that he had boots and a stout great-coat on, and said, 'I am sorry you don't like this; perhaps I can shew you what will please you more.' I strode away, and led him from crag to crag, hill to vale, and vale to hill, for about six hours; till I thought I should have had to bring him home, he was so tired."

This prodigious habit of walking, and that other of lying in luxurious dreamy meditation on sunny bank, or under the shade of trees, account for the very scanty records of study or even desultory reading which these volumes afford. Wordsworth was fairly, though by no means deeply or curiously read in English poetry; Mr. de Quincey adds, in ancient

history; but of this there appears no proof in these volumes, nor the faintest indication in his writings. The only foreign literature for which he seems to have had any taste was Italian, though he could speak French fluently, and had a fair knowledge of German: of the Greek poets he talks, but with the Latin poets he had that familiar acquaintance which was so much more common with our fathers and grandfathers than among ourselves; he even translated into rhymed heroic verse several books of the *Æneid*. With philosophical writers and philosophical systems he shews no acquaintance, and of physical science he had no special knowledge. In fact, his range of reading was extremely limited, and neither his letters nor his recorded conversations would lead us to suppose that within this range his knowledge was profound or his observation keen. We cannot cull from these two volumes a single critical remark that betrays extraordinary sagacity or profound comprehension of an æsthetic law. He had, or fancied that he had, a taste for old books. 'The only modern books that I read,' he writes to Archdeacon Wrangham, 'are those of travels, or such as relate to matters of fact—and the only modern books that I care for; but as to old ones, I am like yourself—scarcely anything comes amiss to me.' We question whether this taste for old books was much more than

a liking for the thoughtful poets of the Stuart period, such as Daniel and Herbert; stimulated perhaps by very genuine indifference towards, if not contempt for, all contemporary literature. Even the great luminaries of our literature only beamed on him from one side of their sphered brightness. Chaucer's descriptions, sparkling with the dews of morning, and his gentle piety of heart; the long-drawn sweetness of Spenser's verse, and the elevated purity of his moral; Milton's austere grandeur of thought and stately pomp of imagination,—all these were Wordsworth's own, and he listened to them with rapt attention as to the voice of his own soul. But of a greater than any or all of these, we can only recal one trace:

The gentle Lady married to the Moor.

And here it is not the agony of passion, nor the subtle working of the insidious poison, nor the diabolic revelation of concentrated coiled malignity, that he dwells on, as characteristic excellencies of the play, but the gentleness of the victim attracts and fascinates him. In all that mighty symphony of maidenly admiration, of manly love, of stately age, of vigorous youth, of calm domestic peace, of 'the pride, pomp, circumstance of glorious war,' of boundless faith, of agonising jealousy, of wrath, hate,

fondness, and despair, all blending into one complex devouring passion, he hears but the simple melody of the flute. In that woof of death shot over with all the glorious and changing hues of life, he sees but one simple flower blooming by a grass-green grave. That marvellous and many-sided life-picture is to him only 'patience sitting on a monument, smiling at grief.' Let us not be misunderstood; of course Wordsworth was acquainted with Shakspeare's works; and of course, with all the world, he placed him with Homer, at the head of the first class of poets, while he knew that Spenser and Milton only belonged to the second. But it is the *of course* that marks the point at which his appreciation stopped. There come from his lips none of those penetrating flashes of light which broke from Coleridge amid lustrous clouds and radiant darkness, whenever he spoke of the great masters of the Epos and the Drama, communicating to others his own illuminating insight, the result at once of profound study and profound affection. In fact, we doubt whether Wordsworth read to enlarge the range of his conception or sympathies. In the language of modern criticism, he kept his own centre, and thence surveyed men and books; never attempted to gain their centre. De Quincey admirably points out how little needful books were to a man who drew such

an 'enormity of pleasure' from the everlasting variety of nature's common appearances, who could derive

> Even from the meanest flower that blows
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears,

who felt that

> One impulse from the vernal wood
> Could teach him more of man,
> Of moral evil, and of good,
> Than all the sages can.

One story, thoroughly characteristic of Wordsworth's indifference to every production of modern growth but his own poetry, we recently heard from a friend. Possibly it may be in print, but we have not seen it. When *Rob Roy* was published, some of Mr. Wordsworth's friends made a pic-nic, and the amusement of the day was to be the new novel. He accompanied them to the selected spot, joined them at luncheon, and then said—'Now, before you begin, I will read you a poem of my own on *Rob Roy*. It will increase your pleasure in the new book.' Of course, every one was delighted, and he recited the well-known verses; and the moment he had finished, said, 'Well, now I hope you will enjoy your book'; and walked quietly off, and was seen no more all the afternoon.

The very rough mode in which he handled books

shewed how little he cared for them. Southey said, to let him into a fine library was like turning a bear into a tulip garden; and De Quincey tells of his cutting open a 'pracht-edition' of Burke with a knife he had just used to butter toast. What a contrast his pious remorse at the ravage of the nut-bough—

> I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
> The silent trees, and the intruding sky;

and the earnest reverence of the exhortation that follows:

> Then, dearest maiden! move along these shades
> In gentleness of heart; *with gentle hand*
> *Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.*

We have left ourselves no space to speak of the poet's later political opinions. It is well known that they were of what is called a high Tory complexion—especially that he looked with no favourable eye on the sort of education that has been latterly spreading among the poor; that he extremely disliked dissent, and disapproved of modern concession to it; that he anticipated the most disastrous consequences from the Catholic Emancipation and Reform Bills. He passed, in fact, apparently from one pole to the other of the political sphere, just as his friends Southey and Coleridge did, and under the influence of like causes, the chief of which was undoubtedly

the strong national feeling that was roused in them all by Napoleon's strides of conquest, and the danger that at one time seemed to threaten England. The violence and crimes of the Jacobins had before this alienated their sympathies from the French Revolution. They, men of thought and feeling, not men of experience and action, had dreamt of a rose-water revolution, and sickened at blood. At first they merely stood aloof, displeased equally at the proceedings of the French and at our declaration of war. But when danger came near 'the inviolate island of the brave and free,' they not only felt as Englishmen and as patriots, but looked upon their country as the last citadel and stronghold of liberty; and henceforth war to the knife with France was identical with devotion to freedom and virtue. During the whole war with Napoleon the Whigs did what they dared to thwart its continuance, and to annoy those who carried it on, and so became to a degree identified with the enemies of the country. This is the feeling that lay originally at the bottom of Wordsworth's dislike of them. Then, again, he never was at heart a democrat. Like Milton, he would have had an aristocracy of intellect and virtue. There is not a trace of the feeling that numbers should outweigh worth, from beginning to end of his writings. He had, besides, a strong distaste for city

life, for its endless bustle and its dull routine, animated as he thought by vanity and the desire of wealth. Commerce, trade, and manufactures were not, in his estimation, the sources of a nation's greatness; but on country life, its occupations, its traditions, and its customs he looked with a fond affection, especially on that national church which so associates itself to the senses, the imagination, and the understanding with a country life. The village spire and the squire's mansion are the centres of this life, and Wordsworth's passion for nature could scarcely have failed to throw something of a poetic lustre, in addition to the value his reason and his heart attached to them, over the institutions of which both were symbols. His early association with Coleridge, too, tended to open to him the deep foundations on which our national institutions rest, and to inspire him with a reverence for them, and a cautious fear of weakening them by attempts at improvement. If, however, any person is inclined to call him reactionist and bigot, we would only remark that there are three classes of politicians,—those who under the pressure of an existing evil seek for change, without the faculty of discerning to what that change will inevitably lead; ignorant, in fact, of the law of development which links together political events and gives unity to history;—those who, with con-

scious and definite aim, plant the great Hereafter in the Now, and are not consequently liable to be startled and terrified, and driven into reaction by the results of their own actions;—and thirdly, those who with clear eye discern the dependence of the Hereafter upon the Now, and because they shrink from the Hereafter, refuse to take the step which renders it inevitably certain. To the last class belonged William Wordsworth.

Fraser's Magazine,
July and August, 1851.

POETRY AND CRITICISM.

Dr. Johnson, in more than a century and a half of English literary history, beginning with Cowley and ending with Gray, found less than threescore writers in verse whom he deemed worthy of a place in his biographical collection. Though, in his own line, and in cases where partiality did not disturb his judgment, a tolerably correct arbiter of literary reputation, the Doctor would find hard work to persuade any well-read person of the present day that more than half the verse-writers whose lives he has composed have any claim to be called poets, or even men of distinguished talents. Perhaps the account might be balanced by the addition to his list of as many names as a modern judgment of the literary celebrities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would erase from it. We have learned to look for other qualities in those we honour with

the name of poets than such as pleased the critics of Johnson's age; or, at least, we have learned a different relative estimate of poetical gifts, and are used to flatter ourselves that ours is a truer and deeper view than the one held by our grandmothers. The result is that reputations have since that time both sunk and risen, forgotten writers have been dug up from the dust of oblivion, and others who lived then *per ora virûm*, in the gossip of Mrs. Thrale's tea-table, and in the pages of the oracular Doctor, are buried out of sight and hearing, and silence covers them. But taking all such changes of opinion into account, the century and a half over which Johnson's immortal work extends—for immortal it must be called, though, in reverence be it spoken, it is a collection of lives which is lamentably wanting in many qualities of first-rate biography—can on no mode of forming the list be made to include a hundred writers in verse who attained even moderate excellence. This gives one for every year and a half at a rough calculation. Of these, our ten fingers amply suffice for the calculation required to number those whose present reputation could be an object of ambition to a reasonable man; and how poorly the denial of lasting fame was compensated to the rest by any Esau's chance of discounting immortality for pottage, 'the Grub-street

tradition,' which belongs to a considerable portion of this period, and the details known of so many of the lives, leave no doubt.

This familiar fact of our literary history may serve, with change of time and place, for a certainly not exaggerated statement of what is true of any equal range of years in the literary history of the world. And it would seem to prove that, however common a certain degree of poetical faculty may be among men—and that it is common, the almost universal liking for poetry indicates—the possession of this faculty in such perfection and strength as to enable the possessor to produce genuine poems is exceedingly rare. Why this is so, and whether the defect be one of nature or of training, an original vigour denied, or a due cultivation neglected, is a most interesting question; but one which would require us to diverge from our immediate route into psychology and the science of education. We merely point to the fact that poetical genius, capable of artistically manifesting itself, is, as a matter of experience, extremely rare. Yet, at this moment, we have ranged before us in 'glittering row,' a set of volumes in verse by not fewer than half as many authors as Johnson found poets in one hundred and fifty years, and these form but a fraction of those published in England within the last year. Not one of these volumes was

published without a belief on the writer's part that he was an exception to the general rule of poetical incapacity. For, draw as we may upon our candour, we cannot suppose that any but a lunatic at large would go to considerable expense to give the world testimony that he or she was that most despised of drudges—a verse-writer without poetical genius. Still less can we suppose that in many of these cases any but the writer has been at the charge of publication. *Sint Mæcenates, non deerunt Marones,* has long ceased to be the limiting condition with authors. The general diffusion of books and wealth produces a capacity for writing verses in numerous persons rich enough to be each his own Mæcenas. And so we are obliged to conclude that, in a single year, there are among us as many persons of comfortable means living under a conviction that they are poets, as there have been writers worthy really of the name, even in the most liberal interpretation of its meaning, since Chaucer five hundred years ago first set our English life to English music. And this goes on every year, so that, by a moderate computation, there cannot be in England at this moment less than a thousand persons, men, women, and adolescents, eating, drinking, sleeping, walking about, and in some cases probably talking rationally and entrusted with important duties, who have committed overt

acts based upon a supposition so extravagant, so contrary to all deductions of experience, so certainly and entirely fanciful in nine hundred and ninety of the thousand cases, as fully, so far as the example extends, to justify the cynical observation, that 'half the world is mad, and the other half does not know it.' Indeed, were we disposed to treat as anything more than one of those amusing delusions incident to the various forms of monomania, the assertion so frequently met with in the preface to published volumes of verse, that the publication has been urged upon the author by admiring friends, we must assume for every monomaniacal verse-publisher a circle of friends afflicted with a still more unaccountable form of monomania, if somewhat more amiable in its symptoms. For the frenzy of the verse-writer may be partially assigned to vanity and the pleasure of composition; that of the admiring friends would be pure Bedlamite distraction. But, in fact, the friends have ever this singularity, that they rejoice in the name of Harris, and neither post-office, police, nor tax-collector knows of their local habitation.

Perhaps we may be suspected of having gone to that expense in educating ourselves for the functions of the critic, which Swift asserts to be indispensable for the true performance of the character, in opposition to those defamers who could make out 'that

a true critic is a sort of mechanic set up with a stock and tools for his trade, at as little expense as a tailor.' Swift denies this position, and says, 'On the contrary, nothing is more certain than that it requires greater layings out to be free of the critic's company, than that of any other you can name. For, as to be a true beggar, it will cost the richest candidate every groat he is worth; so, before one can commence a true critic, it will cost a man all the good qualities of his mind.' We may be suspected, we say, of having got rid of all good-nature, faculty of being pleased, &c., and of laying our indigestion to the charge of wholesome nutriment. The poetry may be good, but we may have no stomach for it. When we have ceased to admire, enjoy, and thrive upon the various banquets which true poets have set before us, rich with the spoils of time, and like the widow's cruse, undiminished by consumption, where appetite but grows by what it feeds on, and fulness is not satiety, nor repetition weariness; when we no longer catch in the poets' strains fragments of that eternal symphony of which they are at once memorial and prophecy; when heart, intellect, and sense cease to find in those strains, broken and imperfect as they are at best, hints of that perfect and harmonious fulness of satisfaction which is the longing desire and anticipated fruition of all faithful souls;—then

we may accept our own deadness of heart and blindness of sight as a probable reason why we look upon the several hundreds of gentlemen and ladies, now living in the land, and convicted of having published volumes of verse, much with the same feelings as a man born deaf must contemplate the whirling mazes of the waltz. Nor can we accuse ourselves of setting up a fanciful standard of poetic excellence, and cultivating a morbid fastidiousness which admits of no excellence that is not perfect. We are too cognisant of the infinite variety of imaginative power, of the admirable effects of this variety, to indulge a narrow taste in poetry; and too well aware of the difficulties that hamper its exercise, and render perfect works of art, or even perfect parts of works of art, the rarest accomplishments of human skill, to be unhealthily fastidious. But with the most catholic aspirations, with the wish to be as large in sympathy and as liberal of admiration as is consistent with any high enjoyment of true excellence, we must draw distinctions between things different in kind; we cannot call Euclid's Elements, on the one hand, poetry; nor can we any more give that honoured title, and the emotions that belong to it, to compositions that have nothing but rhyme and measure—and those seldom good—to separate them from the ordinary

talk of vaguely-perceiving, coldly-feeling, and inarticulately-speaking men and women. In the one case, we call the geometry, perfect as it is, not poetry, but science—a body of abstract truths of space; in the other, we call the producing state of mind stupidity, dulness, weakness, or some other constituent mark of the non-apprehensive; and what is produced we call stuff, nonsense, inarticulate gibberish, or any other term which may seem adequately to present some mark of the non-apprehended.

Let us see if, by following up the antithesis thus suggested between poetry and science, we cannot gain some tolerably clear notions on the essential characteristics of poetry, both as mental process and product—on the nature of poetic insight and of poems. As things in general, whether sensible objects, actions, emotions, and thoughts, are the matter upon which the understanding operates in its search after the body of truth, the knowledge of which we call science; so the same objects furnish to the imagination the subject-matter of that peculiar mode of apprehension which we call poetic, and of that peculiar form of language which we call poetry in the mass, and poems in particular, examples. The difference is not in the objects, but in the faculty which apprehends and operates upon the objects. The understanding takes any object presented through

the consciousness, and proceeds to analyse it into separate qualities, to name it and refer it to a class of objects with which it possesses certain of its qualities in common. Henceforward, when it asks itself what the thing is, the understanding can answer that it is this thing or that, giving some name expressive of those common qualities which it has along with all members of its class. The properties which it has to distinguish it from another member of its class are nothing to science, and the understanding *pro hâc vice* takes no thought about them. Of all science viewed in its statical aspect, apart from the experience of change and the idea of cause, this classification, naming, and definition are the ultimate processes. And if we examine the higher branch of dynamical science, what is it we seek to know about the successive states of the object we investigate? Is it not again an analysis of the concrete phenomena presented to us by experience at successive times that we have to perform? We want to find what is the phenomenon invariably antecedent to some given phenomenon; and we can obtain the knowledge only by analysing a complex coil of phenomena, and after many experiments, much expenditure of hypothesis, we succeed in getting at the invariable antecedent. We have then established the sequence wanted, and all the attendant phenomena are so

much refuse. The process throughout is analytical in its object, and may be described as an endeavour to detect such identities among objects co-existing in space, as will enable the mind to classify, define, and name them, and such connexion between objects successively existing in time, as renders the separate currents of that mighty ocean of intermingling, interacting vortices distinguishable, methodical, intelligible. A scientific apprehension of the universe would be a knowledge of all the classes into which things can at any moment be divided, and of the corresponding classes into which their immediate antecedents would have been divisible. Its lowest concept would be classes cleared of individuals, its most concrete words, names of species, its apotheosis would be when, having unravelled the infinite web of creation, it could pass from the outermost edge of its circumference along a single thread to the centre and the source of all, and its language would then have attained its highest stage of generalisation, and would consist of two words, Cause and Effect.

Imagination takes the same object that we supposed before presented to the understanding;—as by chemical attraction it lays hold on precisely that part of the phenomenon which the understanding rejects, passing lightly over and taking little heed of that which the understanding was in quest of.

What the object has in common with the class to which its name and its definition refer it, the imagination neglects as not characteristic, and seizes eagerly on that which constitutes it an individual. It may or may not happen that science has, in the various systems of classification necessary for its purposes, taken separately and at different times, all the qualities of the object which strike the imagination; but it never happens that it has taken them simultaneously and all together. And we are, therefore, fully justified in saying that imagination neglects, comparatively, the single, separate qualities of an object, on which the understanding is at any one time engaged, and fixes on the complex residue of qualities of which the understanding only takes heed to throw them aside as nothing to the purpose. Where the understanding is looking for such qualities as will enable it to give the object a name common to as many other objects as possible, and therefore including as little content (as the logicians call it) as possible, the imagination is looking for those qualities which fill the senses, stir the emotions, and form a concrete whole, as crowded with content as is consistent with unity. And if a scientific concept of the universe be, as we have said, a concept of classes tending upwards to unity as cause; a poetical view of the universe is an exhaustive presentation of all

phenomena, as individual phenomenal wholes of ascending orders of complexity, whose earliest stage is the organisation of single co-existing phenomena into concrete individuals, and its apotheosis the marvellous picture of the *ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα* of the Infinite Life, no longer conceived as the oceanic pulsation which the understanding called Cause and Effect, but seen as unutterable splendour, heard as awful rhythm of far-sounding harmonies, and comprehended as the Time and Space-vesture of Him who in His own absolute being is incomprehensible.

If any of the writers who may feel aggrieved by our remarks upon their works think fit to revenge themselves by pronouncing this to be sheer nonsense, we shall not take pains to turn the point of the retort. We do not think it so, or we should not allow it to stand; but any extremely abstract and general statement which includes a very large and multifarious class of mental processes and products is sure to be distasteful and unintelligible to most readers, so we shall not weary their patience with what they will probably call metaphysical jargon. But we venture to state as a practical conclusion—not dependent upon the preceding remarks, though involved in them—that whatever objects poetry deals with must be presented to the mind of the poet as concretions of diverse phenomena organised into

phenomenal unity by the pervading vital influence of a subjective idea. And this gives us the fundamental condition of poetic activity as well as of the products of such activity, that such presentations must be made to the mind of the poet, and by him given to the reader, as include and contain at least all the qualities or properties of an object necessary to constitute it a possible phenomenal objective whole. If it be a flower of which the poet wishes to raise the image, it must be a particular flower, and have the form and colour of some particular possible, though not necessarily actual, flower. If his language fails to express these two qualities at least, it fails by so much of being poetic. If it be a human action, it must be presented at least with such characteristics as distinguish one human action from another. If it be a natural scene, the presentation must embrace such objects made out with such detail, as are necessary to distinguish the scene for the purpose in hand from another similar scene. But we need not pursue the illustration. It is evident that poetry attains its aim just in proportion as it creates individual and not general presentations, just in proportion, that is, as it is distinguished from and antithetical to the representations of science.

Let not any one run away with the hasty notion that this amounts to asserting that poetical presenta-

tion consists in enumeration of detail. The fact is just the opposite. It consists in the presentation of a whole, which arranges and subordinates all detail. How much detail is requisite in each case depends upon the nature of the whole contemplated; but in no case is detail enumerated—introduced for its own sake—but organised. There must be parts, but no simple additions of parts will make the whole; on the contrary, they are not parts till the whole is completed, or except in reference to the idea of the whole.

Such, then, are the fundamental properties of poetry, that, as the antithesis of science, it individualises instead of classifying, presents organic wholes instead of severed parts; things actual or possible, instead of abstract general names. Whenever the mind is thus engaged it is making poetry. Language bears testimony to the multifarious and incessant exercise of this power among men from the earliest infancy of our race, and as M. Jourdain talked prose all his life without knowing it, the dullest proser among us would be astonished, and perhaps disgusted, if he were conscious of the vast amount and the high quality of the poetry he utters, between getting up and going to bed, every day of the year. But we live upon the past and inherit other men's labours. We are not poets because we

are the heirs of the poets; and, as a senseless spendthrift squanders untold wealth without any sense of its value, or any adequate return of pleasure or profit, we may squander all the poetry of our current language without any thought of the preciousness of its material, and find in that which might be ever giving us glimpses of the glory and splendour of the universe, only the means of satisfying the wants of our logical or practical understanding. The language which bears the stamp of imagination may by use and insensibility become to us only a circulating medium of conventional signs, and we may apply words and phrases alive with presentative significance, without assigning to them anything more than the representative or symbolical relation to objects which the coinage of the understanding originally expresses.

Now, some one will say, a great deal has been said about poetry, and not a word about verse; and a position has been taken up which assigns to the poetical faculty or faculties an important part in the formation of language, as if rhythm, verse, stanza, rhyme, were no elements of poetry at all, but only accidental graces. We believe them to be no accidental graces, if accidental mean fortuitous; but accidental they certainly are in the logical sense of the word, as not essential to the definition of poetry,

nor conditional of its production. They belong to the poetry of man, because he is an emotional as well as a perceptive being, and arise from the fact that objects presented to the mind with living fulness and power, are by the constitution of our nature adapted to excite an emotion of pleasure, apart from our practical concern with them. Whatever the presentation be in itself, whether the object presented be such as we should like or dislike in its actual manifestation to our senses, or in its effects upon our actual interests, we delight in the satisfaction it gives to our perceptive or speculative faculties. In minds of peculiar sensibility this pleasure is heightened in proportion to the keenness of these faculties, and the attractions of the objects presented, till the emotion excited seeks relief spontaneously by rhythmical expression. We cannot now discuss the law by which all emotion, that is not mere pain, is impelled in its highest degrees to rhythmical expression, nor are we prepared to make any assertion as to the universality of this law, or its limitation to individuals of peculiar organisation. But we think no one will deny that poetry, and music, and dancing, all rhythmical art in fact, did begin, and must have begun, as we have suggested. We believe that, like the fundamental poetic faculty, whose function is to organise diverse phenomena into unities, so this attendant faculty of

singing from the emotions of pleasure caused by the perceptive presentations so made, must be in a degree common to all men and women who can enjoy song. But we are not prepared to maintain this as certain. This, however, we have no doubt about, that the rhythm of poems expresses the emotion of the singer, just as the words of song express the presentations of his imaginative faculty; and that the various forms of metre, its recurrent emphasis, its various pauses, its divisions into stanza and verse, and its modern emphatic identities of terminating sound, are all originally expressive of the varieties of kind and degree of emotion. Upon this point all philosophy of metre, all criticism of the form of poetry, is to be based.

True it is, as we said in reference to poetic language, that use, and the indifference that comes of use, may degrade forms which were originally the spontaneous expression of plastic emotion into stereotyped moulds, which any dullard, blind and crippled, can fill with his clay. The very cause why genuine poetry is, perhaps, a rarer accomplishment in ages of high, or at least, general culture, than in earlier and ruder ages, is precisely the reason why we have so many writers of smooth verse who cannot understand why critics will refuse them the title of poets. Poetical language has become so common,

that while it is within anybody's capacity, the difficulty becomes greater either to select words not hackneyed that express poetical ideas so well as the current words and phrases, or to make these phrases do their original work of presenting real living objects, and not merely abstract names and conventional signs. And the metrical forms have done duty so often, and the ear has become so habituated to their music, and at the same time so dull to their charms, that it requires at once a higher inspiration than ever to write verse from a spontaneous impulse, as distinguished from a mechanical knack, and finer art than ever to cause the reader by means of verse to share that rhythmical condition of emotion which alone justifies to him what is, otherwise, a senseless artifice, and a simple hindrance to clearness of thought and expression.

We have thus briefly sketched the outline of our own theory of poetry in the general—the theory on which, in our opinion, sound criticism must be based —and on which, therefore, we profess to base our own criticism. The principles we have enunciated may be thus summed up. A poem must present its subject as an organic whole, which, though made up of parts common, it may be, to an infinite variety of other wholes, is itself distinct from every other whole, and is recognisable at once for what it is, an

individual not identical with any other individual of the same general character. Any presentation of a subject that falls short of this tends either towards scientific abstraction or towards the utterly inarticulate,—that which neither intellect nor imagination have firmly grasped or clearly apprehended. This is the principle we shall apply to the compositions we are called on to judge, in deciding on their imaginative power. As to questions of form, we have already stated that rhythm, metre, and all that constitutes the mode of expression rather than the substance—though in art it is hazardous to draw hard lines of distinction between form and substance, where form is not conventional—are spontaneous natural signs of the singer's emotion, and, as regards the reader, at once an index to the singer's intensity of poetic temperature—a kind of metronome—and the medium through which the same heat of emotion is kindled in the reader, and he is infused with the passion as well as the imaginative perception of the subject. All, then, we have to ask ourselves in reference to the form of any particular poem is, whether it does so express the emotion of the writer, and what quality and degree of emotion it expresses,—that of a great soul raised to the height of its subject, or of a little soul vainly striving to warm its thin blood, but puny, starved, and shivering, even in presence

of the central fires of the universe. To any poem which will stand the test of the application of these principles the tribute of our hearty admiration is due, and will be joyfully paid. What will not stand this test is not poetry at all; and in masquerading under the poetical costume, it is tolerably sure to lose any worth or attractiveness of sincere human speech, as the voice we may delight to hear in its own natural tones of conversation ceases to charm and becomes painfully ridiculous in attempting the accomplishment of singing, for which nature has not adapted its organisation.

Fraser's Magazine,
February, 1855.

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

A PERSON of cynical temper is likely to note with emphasis, and with the grim pleasure that testifies his perception of a fact his humour can assimilate and grow by, a peculiarity in the mode which poets have almost uniformly adopted in their treatment of love. These interpreters of life would by no means support the cynic in his estimate of that passion; they have, on the contrary, exhausted heaven and earth for similitudes by which to express their sense of the beauty and worth of women, of the woes of slighted, and the raptures of successful, lovers, of the agonies and ecstacies, the torments and the blisses, which women are capable of exciting in the hearts of men, and of the comparative poverty and worthlessness of all the delights of life weighed against one hour of the transports of requited passion, or the calm of satisfied affection. They may, moreover,

be credited with a degree of sincerity in this appreciation, which it would be difficult to accord to their tuneful raptures on many of the other emotional elements of human life. Poets are unquestionably born with fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters occasionally, and by chance aunts and uncles; but except the *Æneid*, *King Lear*, and *Antigone*, we remember no great poem in which the natural affections of kindred have been among the leading motives. Poets, too, have countries with institutions and beliefs, unless Schiller's theory be true, which assigns them the clouds for dwelling-place and domain; but those who have tuned their harps to great national themes, to the foundation of empires, the formation of civil society, the triumphs of liberty and order, the origin of supernatural beliefs, and the growth of religious worship, belong, so far as they have been successful, to a remote past, and are the study of scholars rather than the delight of the people, while their modern imitaters have made the very name of *epic* a bugbear to all moderately sensible and candid minds. In fact, success in the treatment of subjects disconnected with love has been most exceptional; and even the greatest poets, who have looked abroad upon human life, and have found it poetical throughout its whole extent and under every variety of circumstance, have felt the attraction

of love so irresistible, that they have shot its golden threads to illumine the darkest and enliven the dullest parts of their microcosmic web, and to bring down upon the whole surface the sheen of heaven's light; while this universal passion has alone by itself sufficed to make common men poets for the moment, to raise minor poets to unwonted richness of thought and imagery, and has brightened the faces of the great masters of song. By its light, when poetry and the world were young, blind Homer read the tale of Troy; and through a vista of three thousand years, amid myriads of armed warriors, the eye still follows Briseis as she leaves with reluctant feet and reverting gaze the tent where captivity had found a solace, and the stern master was softened into the lover; still above the din of battle, above the grave turmoil of debate, we listen to the fierce Achilles moaning for his lost mistress; the charms of Helen are more to us than the wisdom of Athene and the counsels of Nestor; and the sympathies of all but a few extremely right-minded people are throughout with the Trojans, and would be with Paris, but that he is a downright coward, and the world instinctively adopts the maxim

> None but the *brave*
> Deserve the fair.

Society, and poetry with it, had degenerated between

the birth of the epic full-grown and full-armed, like its own Athene, from the head of Homer, and the time when Æschylus slaughtered Persians at Salamis, and exhibited their ghosts upon the stage at Athens. The *forte* of the Athenian drama certainly does not lie in the representation of love. But then it must be remembered that the Attic stage was eminently the domain of stateliness and conventionality, that waxen masks frozen into one unchanging no-expression, to which even Charles Kean can only feebly approach, would have been an inadequate instrument for rendering so eminently versatile and variable a passion as love, even reflected in the countenance of an ancient philosopher or a modern mathematician. Besides, the construction of the mouthpiece of these masks, to serve for a speaking-trumpet, could only have illustrated one rather curious scene, belonging more to comedy than tragedy—a gentleman proposing to a lady who is stone-deaf. Fancy Romeo, *major humano* by ten inches of cork sole, sweeping along the stage with a drawing-room train of dowager dimensions, and bawling, 'I would I were a glove upon that hand,' through the sort of instrument with which the captain of the *Bellerophon* speaks the *Arrogant* half a mile off. Or, still worse, Juliet sighing through the same instrument, 'O Romeo! O gentle Romeo!' and all that wondrous

play of passion not once flushing up in the cheek or kindling in the eye. But the ugliest old hag that ever rode a broomstick would be less repellent of the gentler emotions than an automaton Venus, made to speak through a *vox humana* organ pipe. In short, without insisting upon the social circumstances of Athenian women, and the peculiar notions that regulated Athenian tragedy, these mere mechanical conditions under which the tragedians wrote are sufficient to account for the insignificant part assigned to love in their compositions, though their choruses abound in passages of the highest lyrical beauty and fervour, which indicate that the passion was still as powerful as ever to sway the feelings and excite the imagination. When the stage became again a mirror of actual contemporaneous life without disguise, as in the later comedy of Menander and his Latin imitator Terence, we find that even the mechanical obstacles before mentioned were not so insuperable but that women play an important part in these dramas, and love becomes a prominent motive and a principal attraction. Pindar unfortunately gave himself up to the turf, the prize-ring, and a curious kind of Pagan high-church hagiology, much as if the editor of *Bell's Life*, the author of *Boxiana*, and the poet of the *Christian Year*, were all three gentlemen in one. The universal human vein shews itself, however,

here and there, with a strange gleam of tenderness, in stray biographical allusions and moral reflections, interspersed with the main subject in hand, which is always to celebrate some Derby event of that old time, or to trace up the lineage of Hellenic game-chickens and White-headed Bobs to Hercules. In Theocritus, again, love is 'the main haunt and region' of the song, and that song about the sweetest whose echo still sounds over the waters of Time from the dim shore of ancient Hellas. Then if we come somewhat nearer to our own times, and to poets who have influenced modern literature—at least, up to a very recent period—more than their greater Hellenic brethren have done, the names of Ovid and Horace suffice to carry on the succession. Horace certainly wrote plenty of good moral sentiment and patriotism of the sort possible under a despotism of the modern French type; but he will always be for us the little fat man who loved and lived with various Lalages, and made them, we feel perfectly assured, of more account in his existence than the great 'nephew of his uncle,' his prime minister Mæcenas, or even, we fear, than the Palatine Apollo himself, and that Jupiter Optimus Maximus who half frightened the little sceptic with summer thunder. Even the grandiloquent Virgil cannot get through his epic without a strong spice of love, and pious Æneas

vindicates for himself the English as well as the Latin force of the stereotyped epithet by behaving like a scoundrel to a woman, and sneaking off without even saying Good-bye, or leaving a christening-cup for the possible Tyrian Iulus. That episode has saved the *Æneid* from becoming a mere scholar's poem, in spite of its magnificent versification. And when a greater than Virgil took up his mantle, was it not—by permission of the allegorists, be it spoken—by the woman whom he loved that Dante was guided to the Heaven of Heavens,—to the presence of the Ineffable? Nay, was it not in reality under her guidance—

> Donna beata e bella
> Tal che di comandare io la richiesi,

as her messenger says of her—that the poet ventured all through that mystic voyage?—by her goodness, sweetness, and beauty alone that his heart was sustained amid the wrongs, the torments, the purgatorial discipline of life?—by the light of love alone that life became to him tolerable and intelligible? And in spite of his stern theology, with its

> Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate,

is it not just amid hell's fiercest torments that love—the most passionate, the most sensuous love of man and woman—shews itself to him mightier than the

torment, outbraving despair, and stronger in its own simple strength than Hell and Fate, and that terrible foreknowledge of an eternity without hope? It is needless to pursue a topic so familiar through the great names of modern poetry. Only conceive this passion of love blotted out from the pages of our own first-class poets, from Chaucer, from Spenser, from Shakspeare, from Milton—what a sky without its sun would remain! what an earth without its verdure, its streams, and its flowers! Something, no doubt, there would be still to attract us in the manner-painting, the grand thoughts, the vivid natural descriptions; but even these would have lost a charm that now often insensibly mingles with them and enhances them. And the poor minors; where would they be? All of them in the same category that Drayton's *Polyolbion*, Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals*, Davenant's *Gondibert*, were in before Southey and Co. fanned a small flame of antiquarian poetic enthusiasm, and are in again now that small flame has gone out. Here and there some lyric, short and tersely expressed, would survive in popular esteem, especially if wedded to sweet music; but the bulk would float in undistinguished heaps by Lethe's wharf, and scientific cultivators of literature would resort to them, as agriculturists do to the guano stores, to fertilise dry brains, and astonish the world

with spasmodic crops of lectures on historical development of poetry, and so forth. If we go on to English poetry since the Revolution, we find the same, or even greater, predominance of this single element of emotion. With the exception of a few reflective and satirical poems—that is, with the exception of versified sermons and essays borrowing some of the ornaments of poetry proper—where is the really popular poem that does not depend for its main charm on its pictures of love? What would even Walter Scott himself be without it? Cowper indeed is a real exception, so far as his poetry does not come under the head of reflective or satirical, as most of it does; but Cowper was no less exceptional as a man than as a poet; he fell early in life into hypochondria and confirmed valetudinarianism, and was anything but a normal specimen of the warm-blooded male mammal whose differentia is poetry-writing. Byron, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, have written the finest poetry of passion since the Elizabethans; Moore wrote little else than sentimental love poetry; Campbell's *Gertrude* stands highest of his long poems; and if Wordsworth thought to wield a poet's influence while he regarded the poet's mightiest spell as a Circean drug, has not the result been that he is more respected than loved, almost universally acknowledged to be a great teacher, but a heavy

writer, and that the poems and passages of his which are the greatest favourites are precisely those, like *Laodamia, Ruth, She was a Phantom*, &c., in which he has mingled this spell, or composed his enchantment entirely of it? We will not say a word here of Mr. Tennyson, for his name alone at once brings to the mind some of the most delicious love poetry in the English language, however much noble poetry of another kind it may also recal.

The cynic, then, with whom we started, has certainly no great reason to pique himself upon the support his opinions obtain from the poets, so far as his and their estimate of love are brought into direct comparison. But the fact that he would not fail to notice as characteristic in the poetical estimate, and supporting his own opinion rather than theirs of the worth of women and of the influence of love upon human happiness, is that, with a very few exceptions, the poets expend their raptures upon the period of courtship rather than of marriage, upon the pursuit rather than the attainment, as if a woman were like a fox, precious only for the excitement of the chase, worthless when won. Or if they venture at all beyond the wedding-day, it is too often to treat marriage—according to that terrible *mot* of Sophie Arnauld—as the sacrament of adultery. A vast quantity of literature turning on this crime

is written indeed in the spirit of that typical young Parisian who, seeing an injured husband on the stage shoot his wife's seducer, was heard to mutter to himself, 'Cochon de mari!' And our cynical friend might go over nearly the same range of poetry that we have taken, and would shew us that Briseis was not the wife, but the mistress, of Achilles; that Helen's husband was not Paris, but Menelaus. He would add that Odysseus only sighed for Penelope while he was away from her, enduring moil and toil in the trenches before Troy, and remembering the substantial comforts of his island home, as well as its sentimental attractions; moreover, that as soon as he returned he was tired of his wife, and finally could not stand domestic felicity any longer, but proceeded on a voyage with an extremely vague destination, from which he took good care never to return. The Greek tragedians, too, would furnish our friend with ample materials for his humour. Though there is little enough in their plays of that love which is the flower of life, making youth glorious, manhood calm and strong, and age peaceful and serene, there is enough and to spare of all the foul and terrible results that belong to the corruption of this consummate excellence. We should hear of Clytemnestra and Phædra, of Deianira and Medea; be told probably that the Furies were

represented as women; that mythology, the mother of poetry, began and continued in this key, having little to say of faithful wives and constant lovers, but delighting in vagrant loves, in ladies celestial and semi-celestial, all acting with the largest liberality. We fear, too, that the lovers in the Pastorals of Theocritus had not been to the register's office; and Queen Dido could no more have been received at Queen Victoria's court than Queen Isabella the Second. The loves of Ovid and Horace were little better, it is to be feared, than that poor Violetta at whom the great *Times* has been letting off such tremendously overcharged artillery. Dante, too, unfortunately had a wife and children at home all the time he was taking that mystic journey under the protection of the *Donna beata e bella;* and Petrarch's Laura, *par excellence*, the type of a poet's mistress, was another man's wife. The ladies of the present day would scarcely thank Chaucer for his portraiture of Griselda; and the *Wife of Bath*, which, it is said, Dr. Doddridge used to read aloud to the young misses of his pious circle, cannot be considered on the whole complimentary to the fairer half of mankind. The only thoroughly charming wife whom Shakspeare represents, was married to a black man, and throttled by him in the honeymoon or shortly after. Spenser's idolatry was paid to a maiden

queen, on the very ground of her maidenhood. Milton's Eve—no less, the cynic would say, from the poet's personal experience of married life than from the historical necessity—ruined her husband, and brought upon the whole world sin, woe, and death. Our 'Augustan' poets were not, as a class, sentimental men. Swift, Pope, and Addison are three persons as thoroughly *desillusionnés* as M. de Rochefoucauld himself; and Matthew Prior turned for such feminine consolations as he needed to the Lalages of Drury Lane. Byron, Scott, Shelley, Keats, all paint courtship, not marriage; if Burns wrote *John Anderson my Jo, John*, and *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, he wrote *Amang the Rigs of Barley* with quite as much gusto, and modulated into that key a great deal oftener than into any other. Mr. Tennyson has indeed written the *Miller's Daughter*, and the close of the *Princess;* but we should be reminded that the latter is merely a lover's anticipation, his ideal picture of what married life should be, and that the miller's daughter's husband is not a strikingly interesting person, if he be not to be called decidedly imbecile, in spite of the two charming songs of which he claims the authorship.

The cynic has unquestionably a strong *prima facie* case. It is a remarkable fact, that wedded love has been almost uniformly rejected, as offering

no available material for high poetry, except in its corruption, as a theme for tragedy; while, on the other hand, satirical and comic writers have exhausted ridicule and malignity in depicting the vices, the absurdities, and the mean miseries, of people who are ill-matched in marriage. As we believe that the elements of high poetry exist wherever human hearts beat with true vital heat; and as we furthermore believe that the emotional and truly human life of a man and woman, so far from being over when, from lovers, they become husband and wife, then only begins to attain its full growth and capacity of bearing fruit and flower of perennial beauty and fragrance, we are tempted to inquire into some of the causes of this one-sidedness which we have charged the poets with, and to indicate briefly some of the real poetical capabilities of wedded love, and the sort of treatment they require in being wrought into actual poems.

The first and most obvious temptation to limit the poetical representation of love to the period before marriage, lies in the fact that this period seems spontaneously to supply that *beginning*, *middle*, and *end* which narrative or dramatic poems are truly enough supposed to require. Courtship, in ordinary cases, divides itself into two phases, the termination of each of which is a point of definite interest, towards which

all the incidents, all the talk, all the surprises, suspensions, difficulties, and triumphs, which make up the plot of a love-story, are directly subordinated. A man falls in love with a woman, and has to win his way by degrees more or less rapid and eventful to her affection; this is the first phase, rich, as experience proves, in elements of poetical pleasure, which all men and women are capable of enjoying without effort. Then follows the period, richer still in all the materials for varied incident, in which the social arrangements come in to interpose obstacles between the lover and his mistress, and to keep the interest of the reader or spectator always on the stretch. The advantage is beyond all computation which this natural framework, made ready to his hand, confers upon the poet who seeks mainly to amuse his audience by a series of connected occurrences, in each of which the least cultivated, the least thoughtful, the least generous, can take an interest that demands no strain, scarcely any activity, of the imagination, the heart, or the reason. And the free, vigorous exercise of the imagination is so rare among mankind, that it is little wonder that poets have been content with making their appeals to sympathies that are sure to have been familiar to the hearts of their audience at some time or other in the actual experience of life, and need but the faintest outline

of reality in the representation to awaken them again. But though it must be allowed that the love of husband and wife offers no such obvious and facile series of connected incidents, with well-marked divisions, and all tending, by due gradations of interest, to one event; and though in proportion as the interest of poetry is made to turn less on striking outward circumstances, a heavier demand is made upon the imagination of both writer and reader, and a mere passive reception of familiar thoughts and feelings becomes no longer sufficient for the enjoyment of the poem; yet this only amounts to saying that poetry has some higher function than to amuse idle people, some nobler office in cultivating the heart, and enlarging the range of the inner life, than can be attributed to it so long as it merely strikes one chord of feeling, or at best plays over and over again, from the beginning of Time to its close, the same old tune in different keys and on different instruments. It is, indeed, quite true that it would be impossible to mark the commencement of any poem, which should deal with ordinary wedded love as its main subject, by an event as definite as the first meeting of a man with his future mistress, or a feeling as definite, as distinct from his previous state of mind, as the first awakening of the passion that is to rule his life henceforward through the story. The same remark

applies as forcibly to the want of any event equally definite with marriage to serve for a termination, unless all such poems were to have a mournful close, and end with a deathbed, or fall into the old tragic vein of seduction, adultery, and murder. We must candidly consent to give up that source of interest which lies in the changes produced upon the outward relation, upon the union or separation of outward existence between the two persons whose inner relations, whose mutual influence upon each other, and affection towards each other, are by supposition the subject of the poem. Instead of watching the formation of a double star, and having all our interest concentrated upon the critical moment when the attraction of one for the other finally draws them within the inevitable vortex in which they are henceforth eternally to revolve, we have to explore the laws, and witness the phenomena, of their mutual action, henceforward bound by a limit, in the preservation of which consists the whole peculiarity, the whole interest, of this class of objects. Or, if we may be allowed another illustration from physical science, instead of having to deal with a problem mainly dynamical, we advance into the higher because more complex and mysterious region of chemistry, and are dealing, not with the mutual action of distinct bodies, but with the composition of bodies, with

the changes their constituent atoms undergo by combination, and by the action of the subtle elements—heat, light, electricity, and so forth. Will any one deny that the analogy is a true analogy? And if it be so, is it not mere sloth and dulness, mere want of subtle imagination, of delicate sensibility, that can complain of want of incident, and consequent want of interest, in the drama of wedded love? There can be no want of incident, so long as character influences fortune, and fortune character; so long as the destinies of human beings in this world are carved out by their virtues and their vices; so long as wisdom and goodness sweeten the bitterest cup of adversity; so long as folly and wickedness infuse gall into the bowl of nectar which fortune hands her favourites in jewelled gold. It is the stupidity of poets which can see no incident in married life so long as the marriage vow is kept to the letter in the grossest interpretation of that letter; and which has for the most part induced them, when they have introduced married people at all, to use marriage to give a spicier piquancy to intrigue, or a darker glow to hatred and revenge.

But this notion of want of incident unfitting married love to be a subject for poetry is closely connected with another notion still more false, vulgar, and immoral. The romance of life is over, it is said,

with marriage; nothing like marriage, is the congenial reply, for destroying illusions and nonsense. In which notable specimens of 'the wisdom of many men expressed in the wit of one,' there are two remarkable assertions involved. The first is that love is an illusion; the second, that marriage destroys it. We may concede to the wisdom of the market-place thus much of truth, that the love which marriage destroys is unquestionably an illusion. We may also concede to it this further truth, that the love of husband and wife is no more the love of the man and woman in the days of their courtship, than the blossom of the peach is the peach, or the green shoots of corn that peep above the snows of February are the harvest that waves its broad billows of red and gold in the autumn sun. If indeed there are persons so silly as to dream, in their days of courtship, that life can be an Arcadian paradise, where caution, self-restraint, and self-denial are needless; where inexhaustible blisses fall like dew on human lilies that have only to be lovely; a world from the conception of which pain and imperfection, sin, discipline, and moral growth are excluded, marriage undoubtedly does destroy this illusion, as life would destroy it were marriage out of the question. If, too, attracted originally to each other by some slight and indefinable charm, by some chord of sympathy

vibrating in harmony at a moment's accidental touch, often by the mere force of the tendency at a particular age to what the great Florentine calls—

> Amor che al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
> Amor che a nullo amato amar perdona,

two young persons fancy that this subtle charm, this mysterious attraction, is endowed with eternal strength to stand the shocks of time, the temptations of fresh attractions, the more fatal because more continual sap of unresting egotism, ever active to throw down the outworks and undermine the citadel of love; and trusting to it alone, think that wedded happiness can be maintained without self-discipline, mutual esteem and forbearance; without the charity which covers the defects it silently studies to remove; without the wisdom and the mutual understanding of character to which profound and patient love can alone attain —this is another illusion which marriage will destroy. What is, however, generally meant by the sayings we have quoted, is, that there is nothing like marriage for taking the passion out of people, for taking out of them all disinterested aspirations, all noble hopes and fears, all delicacy of sentiment, all purity of mind, all warmth of heart—nothing like marriage for making them see, in respectable money-making, in respectable dinners, respectable furniture, carriages,

and so forth, the be-all and the end-all of human existence. So far as marriage in our actual world realises these noble predications—and, so far as it does, the result is mainly owing to the miserable views of life and its purposes which society instils into its youth of both sexes, being still, as in Plato's time, the sophist *par excellence*, of which all individual talking and writing sophists are but feeble copies—just so far is married love, if the phrase is to be so outrageously perverted, utterly unfit for any high poetry, except a great master of tragedy should take in hand to render into language the too common tragi-comedy of a human soul metamorphosing itself into a muckworm. But surely every one can look round among his acquaintance, and find marriages that are not after this type, marriages which

> have wrought
> Two spirits to one equal mind,
> With blessings beyond hope or thought,
> With blessings which no words can find.

The romance of life gone! when with the humblest and most sordid cares of life are intimately associated the calm delights, the settled bliss of home?—when upon duties, in themselves perhaps often wearisome and uninteresting, hang the prosperity and the happiness of wife and children?—when there is no

mean hope, because there is no hope in which regard for others does not largely mingle—no base fear, because suffering and distress cannot affect self alone? —when the selfishness which turns honest industry to greed and noble ambition to egotistical lust of power is exorcised?—when life becomes a perpetual exercise of duties which are delights, and delights which are duties? Once romance meant chivalry; and the hero of romance was the man who did his knightly devoirs, and was true and loyal to God and his lady-love. If with us it has come to mean the sensual fancies of nerveless boys, and the sickly reveries of girls, for whose higher faculties society can find no employment, it is only another instance in which the present is not so much wiser and grander than the past, as its flatterers are fond of imagining. To us it appears that where the capacity for generous devotion, for manly courage, for stedfast faith and love exists, there exists the main element of romance; and that where the circumstances of life are most favourable for the development of these qualities in action, they are romantic circumstances, whether the person displaying them be, like Alton Locke, a tailor, or, like King Arthur, a man of stalwart arm and lordly presence. Nor do we see that the giants, dragons, and other monsters of the old romance, are in themselves one whit more interesting than the

obstacles that beset the true modern knight in his struggles to perform manfully the duties of his life, and to carry out the noble spirit of that vow which he has solemnly taken at the altar,—to love, comfort, honour, and keep in sickness and in health, the woman who has put her youth, her beauty, her life, and happiness into his hands.

It may, however, be said that married life, when it is not utterly corrupted into crime and wretchedness—when, that is, it in any degree answers to its ideal—is necessarily monotonous; and that, though to the husband and wife it may be a perpetual source of discipline and delight, it offers no scope to the poet, whose story must march, his characters develop, and their passions and affections exhibit change, gradation, and culmination. We have already admitted so much of this objection, as to concede to the period before marriage greater facilities for marked gradations of interest, depending on changes in the outward relations of the persons whose fortunes and feelings are being narrated. We have said that those outward relations once fixed by marriage, the action of the poem which is to depict married love must lie within narrow limits, and that its interest must depend on more subtle delineation of shades of character and feeling, on a perception, in a word, of those effects which spring from the conduct of the

affections in married life, and those influences which circumstance and character combine to work in the affections, and which, slight and commonplace as some persons may choose to think them, are important enough to make human beings happy or miserable, and varied enough to account for all the differences that an observant eye can find in modern family life. And the fact, which few persons will dispute, that in our actual family life there is found, quite irrespective of distinctions of class and differences of wealth, every possible gradation of happiness and misery, of vulgarity and refinement, of folly and wisdom, of genial sense and fantastic absurdity, is a sufficient answer to those who talk of the monotony of married life as an objection to its fitness for yielding materials for poetry. In real truth, there is much more monotony in courtship than in marriage. A sort of spasmodic and, to spectators well acquainted with the parties, a somewhat comical amiability is the general mask under which the genuine features of the character are hidden. Moreover, the ordinary interests of life become throughout that period comparatively insipid; and lovers are proverbially stupid and tiresome to every one but themselves. No doubt this has its compensating advantage for the poet, who transforms his readers into the lovers for the time being; but it certainly gives monotony to all mani-

festations of the passion in this its spring-time, which is not found in the same passion when the character has recovered from the first shock, and life, with all its interests, again enters into the heart, but invested with new charms and higher responsibilities, and with the deeper, fuller affections swelling in a steady current through the pulses.

So much for those more obvious objections that may in great measure account for the almost universal rejection of married love as a theme for poetry. We do not care to argue against any one who says, much less any one who thinks, that it is only young men and women who are interesting. Even with respect to mere sensuous beauty, it is a great absurdity to suppose that its splendour and charm are confined to two or three years of early womanhood. 'Beaucoup de femmes de trente ans,' says a shrewd French writer, after enumerating the supposed attractions of youth in women, 'ont conservé ces avantages; beaucoup de femmes de dix-huit ans ne les ont plus ou ne les ont jamais eu.' Certainly no Englishman who uses his eyes needs this assurance; and no one who delights in the society of women can doubt that they continue to grow in all that charms the heart and intellect, in all the materials of poetry, after they become wives and mothers.

There is, however, one solid objection to the tenor of our remarks to which we are inclined to give great weight. We can fancy many persons, for whose opinions we have the highest respect, protesting against the intrusion of the poet into the recesses of married life, against the analysis of feelings that were not given us to amuse ourselves with, against

> Those who, setting wide the doors that bar
> The secret bridal chambers of the heart,
> Let in the day.

Literature was made for man, and not man for literature. There are, unquestionably, scenes which the imagination had better leave alone, thoughts which should find no utterance in printed speech, feelings upon which the light and air cannot dwell without tainting them. But without in the slightest degree trenching upon ground that should be sacred to silence, we conceive married life, as one of the most powerful influences at work upon the character and happiness of individuals and of nations, to present capabilities of noble and beautiful poetry, that, so far from weakening the strength or vulgarising the delicacy of domestic affection, would exalt and refine it. We see no reason for supposing that the conjugal relation would suffer in purity or spontaneous power by being passed through the alembic of a great poet's

imagination. If it became the subject of morbid poetry or of weak maudlin poetry—supposing such a combination of terms allowable—the same result would follow as from the morbid or weak treatment of any other powerful human emotion—the poet would influence only weak and morbid people. Nor do we see that the danger is really so great of getting morbid, trashy, unhealthy poetry on this subject as on the more familiar subject of love before marriage. It would demand qualities of genius which in themselves are a strong guarantee; the power and the taste of delineating subtle shades of character and feeling; a perception of the action of character upon fortune; an insight into the working of practical life upon the affections, and their reaction upon it. Such topics are not to the taste, or within the capacity, of melodramatic or sensualised minds; and whatever good poetry was produced on the subject would, as all good poetry does, abide and work upon the highest class of minds, and go on ever spreading its wholesome influence, and giving the tares less and less room to grow. Our domestic life is not so uniformly beautiful as that it may not be profited by having its faults, its short-comings, its miseries brought into the full light of consciousness, as only poets can bring them; and bright pictures of what that life might be, what it sometimes is in actual experience,

may surely do good as well as give pleasure. But we are not so much concerned to vindicate a large field of strictly ethical teaching for poetry as to open to her almost untried and certainly unhackneyed regions of beauty, pathos, and varied human interest; to bid her cease to stop at the threshold, and boldly, fearlessly, and reverently penetrate into the inner shrine of love—cease to sing for ever of the spring-green and the promise,' and to remember that love has its flush of summer, its glow of autumn, and its winter's lonely desolation. Happily, we have not to advocate a theory without being able to produce recent cases of successful practice. Mr. Kingsley's *Saint's Tragedy*, those poems by Mr. Tennyson of which we have already spoken, and some of the most beautiful of Mr. Browning's lyrical poems, as well as his narrative poem of *The Flight of the Duchess*, and such a character-piece as his *Andrea del Sarto*, will indicate sufficiently how rich a field lies waiting for observation and delineation in poetry of the highest order. Some of the pieces introduced upon our stage within the last few years, principally of French origin —such as, for instance, *Still Waters Run Deep*—in spite of the coarse tendency to make adultery too constant a feature of the action, point to the capabilities of the subject for lighter treatment.

One word before we close upon two special

advantages to be anticipated from the habitual extension of poetical representation to married love. The subject, in the first place, interests mature men and women, who must feel, at the perpetual iteration of the first stage of passion in literature, much as if their bodily diet were confined to syllabub and sweetmeats. Poetry is comparatively little read by grown people who do not pretend to cultivate literature as a special study—mainly, we apprehend, because it confines itself to repeating, with a variety of circumstance, experiences which they have passed through, and of the partial and one-sided truth of which they have long ago been convinced by their more mature experience. Poetry which interpreted to them their own lives, which made them see in those lives elements of beauty and greatness, of pathos and peril, would win their attention, stimulate their interest, and refine their feelings, just as much as the same effects are produced by ordinary love-poetry on the young. We shall not argue the question whether the latter effect has been upon the whole for good or not; such an assumption lies at the root of all discussions upon particular extensions of the poetic range. To us it appears indisputable that, along with some perils, the representation of any phase of human life by a man of genuine poetic power is a step towards improving that phase

practically, as well as an enlargement of the range of that life which forms so important a part of a modern man's cultivation, the life he partakes by imaginative sympathy.

A second advantage which we should anticipate from the proposed extension would be the creation of a literature which would, in some important respects, rival and outweigh any real attraction which the properly styled 'literature of prostitution' may have for any but *mauvais sujets*. It may shock some good and innocent people to be told that such literature is attractive to any but abandoned men and women. A statistical account of the perusal of the worst class of French novels by the educated classes of this Christian and highly moral country would probably be a startling revelation. One can only say off-hand, that a familiar acquaintance with this class of works is commonly displayed in society; and the reasons are not very recondite. These novels depict a certain kind of real life without reserve; there is flesh and blood in them; and though some of the attraction is due to the mere fact that they trench on forbidden ground, some to the fact that they stimulate tendencies strong enough in most men, and some to their revelations of scenes invested with the charm of a licence happily not familiar to the actual experiences of the majority of their readers,

there can be little question that one strong attraction they possess is due to their being neither simply sentimental nor simply ascetic. In accordance with an established maxim, which tells us that *corruptio optimi pessima est*, these books are almost inconceivably worthless, even from an artistic point of view, but the passions of these novels are those of grown people, and not of babies or cherubim. We can conceive a pure poetry which should deal with the men and women of society in as fearless and unabashed a spirit, and which should beat this demon of the stews at his own magic,—should snatch the wand from the hand of Comus, and reverse all his mightiest spells; though, doubtless, this task belongs more to prose fiction, as the objectionable works are themselves prose fictions. In the poems we have already mentioned, this has been done. There is no reason why literature, or poetry in particular, should be dedicated *virginibus puerisque;* men and women want men's and women's poetry; the affections and the passions make up the poetical element of life, and no poetry will commend itself to men and women so strongly as that which deals with their own passions and affections. Again we say, we are not careful to guard our language against wilful misconstruction.

The volume published last year, with the title of

The Angel in the House, Part I., inspired us with the hope that a poet of no ordinary promise was about to lay down the leading lines of this great subject in a composition half narrative and half reflective, which should at least shew, as in a chart, what its rich capabilities were, and give some indication of the treasures that future workers in the same mine might have gathered in, one by one. But two parts have been already published, and he has only got as far as the threshold of his subject; while the age is no longer able to bear poems of epic length, even with, and much less without, epic action. He has encumbered himself besides with the most awkward plan that the brain of poet ever conceived. The narrative is carried on by short cantos—idyls, he calls them—in which, however, the reflective element largely prevails; and between each of these are introduced, first, a poem wholly reflective, and as long as the corresponding narrative canto, upon some phase of passion not very strictly connected with the narrative, and then a set of independent aphorisms, which are often striking in sentiment and sense, and frequently expressed with admirable terseness and force, but which convey the impression that the writer is resolved not to lose any of his fine things, whether he can find an appropriate place for them or not. We doubt whether any excellence of execution

would have won great success for a poem written on such a plan, and threatening to extend to such a formidable length. But had the writer really set about singing his professed theme, and not wasted his strength and the patience of his readers in this twofold introduction, he possesses many of the qualities requisite for success. His conception of feminine character is that of a high-minded, pure-hearted, and impassioned man, who worships and respects as well as loves a woman. His delineation of the growth of love in the woman's heart is delicate and subtle, and the lofty aspirations and unselfish enthusiasm he associates with the passion of his hero no less true to the type he has chosen. And as we conceive him not so much to intend to relate the story of any individual man and woman as to embody in a narrative form a typical representation of what love between man and woman should be, he cannot be censured for selecting two persons of a nature higher-toned and circumstances richer in happy influences than fall to the lot of most of us in this world. Had it been the purpose of our paper to review *The Angel in the House* we could have found many admirable passages in which sentiments of sterling worth and beauty are expressed with great force and felicity of language. Perhaps the only very prominent fault of execution lies in the writer's

tendency to run into logical puzzles by way of expounding the paradoxical character of love, which, like wisdom, is yet justified of her children. This tendency betrays him not only into prosaic and even scholastic phraseology, that gives frequently a ludicrous turn to his sentiments, but tempts him too often into the smartness of epigram, varied by the obscurity of transcendental metaphysics. To the same feature of his mind, as shewn in the fondness for this way of expressing his subject, we are inclined to attribute the jerkiness of the verse, which often reads like a bit of *Hudibras* slightly altered, and is very dissonant from the innermost spirit of the poem. If we might venture to offer a bit of advice by way of conclusion, we should say to him, forget what you have done; treat these two parts as an experiment that has partially failed; begin at the real subject—married love—on a different plan and in a different key. Let the narrative, the drama, occupy a more prominent position; reject every phrase, every turn of thought, that appears to you to be particularly smart and clever, and adopt a measure that cannot run into jingle, but will flow with a calm delicious melody through the pleasant lands along which its course will lie. And if we add one exhortation more, it will be to guard against over-refinement; not to be afraid of

the warm blood and beating pulse of humanity; to remember that the angel in the house is, as the least sensuous of poets reminds us,

An angel, but a woman too.

Fraser's Magazine,
October, 1856.

CARLYLE'S LIFE OF STERLING.

The domain of political economy is not unlimited; the laws of supply and demand are not the only or the strongest forces at work in nature. Here is a man whom the world would have been well content to leave quiet in his early grave by the sea-shore in the sweetest of English islands; to leave him there to the soft melodies of the warm wind and the gentle rain, and the pious visits now and then of those who knew and loved him when his eye was bright and his voice eloquent with sparkling thoughts and warm affections. He had done nothing that the public cared for; had left no traces on the sands of Time that the next tide would not have effaced. But he lived amongst men who write books, amongst some of the very best of such; and two of the foremost of them loved him so well that they could not let his memory die,—thought that the positive actual results

of his life made known to the public were but faint indications of the power that lay in him, though sorely foiled and baffled, and that he in his individual spiritual progress typified better than most the struggle that the age is passing through, its processes and its results. But the two men, though united in affection for Sterling, were so different in other respects, that the memorial raised by the one could scarcely fail to be unsatisfactory to the other. Archdeacon Hare, the author of the earlier biography, is a man of encyclopædic knowledge, a profound classical scholar, the most learned and philosophical of modern English theologians, at once accurate and wide in his acquaintance with European history and literature. And this large survey of the forms under which the men of the past have thought and acted has not led in him to an indifference to all forms, but rather to a keener sense of the organic vitality of forms, especially of national institutions, whether civil or ecclesiastical polities, states or churches. Moreover, apart from this general characteristic, which would lead to an intellectual and practical reverence for the institutions of his own land, and a hesitating caution in the introduction of constitutional changes, Mr. Hare is an English churchman of no ordinary cast. He has passed from the region of traditional belief, has skirted the bogs and

sands of doubt and disbelief, and has found firm footing where alone it seems possible, in a revelation whose letter is coloured by the human media through which it has passed, and in a faith whose highest mysteries are not only harmonious with but necessary complements to the truths of reason. The English Church is to him the purest embodiment of his religious idea, as the English constitution was to him, in common with Niebuhr, Coleridge, and other great thinkers, of the idea of a state. Such a man could not write a life like Sterling's without feeling that his relation to Christianity and the Church was the great fact for him as for all of us; and that the change in him, from hearty acceptance of Christian doctrine and church organisation to a rejection of the former and something very like contempt for the latter, needed explanation. That explanation he has sought in the overthrow of the balance of Sterling's life through repeated attacks of illness, which shut him out from practical duties, and threw him entirely upon speculation, thereby disproportionately developing the negative side of him, already too strong from early defects of education; and few persons will, we should think, be found to deny Mr. Hare's general position, that the pursuit of speculative philosophy as the business of life has this tendency; Mr. Carlyle, we should

have supposed, least of all men. But a special cause interferes with Mr. Carlyle's recognition of the principle as applicable to Sterling. Christianity as understood commonly, perhaps everywhere except, it may be, at Weimar and Chelsea, and church formulas certainly as understood everywhere, he is in the habit of classing under a category which in his hands has become an extensive one—that of *shams*. He calls them by various forcible but ugly names,—as 'old clothes,' 'spectral inanities,' 'gibbering phantoms,' or, with plainer meaning, 'huge unveracities and unrealities.' That Sterling at any time of his life accepted these for 'eternal verities' he cannot consider a step from the 'no' to the 'yes,' nor their repudiation as a step backwards from the 'yes' to the 'no.' Let him speak for himself. He is commenting on Sterling's entry into orders as Mr. Hare's curate at Hurstmonceaux.

Concerning this attempt of Sterling's to find sanctuary in the old Church, and desperately grasp the hem of her garment in such manner, there will at present be many opinions; and mine must be recorded here in flat reproval of it, in more pitying condemnation of it, as a rash, false, unwise, and unpermitted step. Nay, among the evil lessons of his time to poor Sterling I cannot but account this the worst; properly indeed, as we may say, the apotheosis, the solemn apology and consecration, of all the evil lessons that were in it to him. Alas, if we did remember the divine and awful nature of God's Truth, and had not so forgotten it as poor doomed creatures

never did before,—should we, durst we in our most audacious moments, think of wedding *it* to the world's untruth, which is also, like all untruths, the Devil's? Only in the world's last lethargy can such things be done, and accounted safe and pious. Fools! 'Do you think the Living God is a buzzard idol,' sternly asks Milton, that you dare address Him in this manner?—Such darkness, thick sluggish clouds of cowardice and oblivious baseness, have accumulated on us; thickening as if towards the eternal sleep! It is not now known, what never needed proof or statement before, that Religion is not a doubt; that it is a certainty,—or else a mockery and horror. That none or all of the many things we are in doubt about, and need to have demonstrated and rendered probable, can by any alchemy be made a 'Religion' for us; but are and must continue a baleful, quiet or unquiet, Hypocrisy for us; and bring—*salvation*, do we fancy? I think it is another thing they will bring; and are on all hands, visibly bringing, this good while!

Herein consists the whole difference between Hare and Carlyle in their views of Sterling's career. They look at it from such opposite points that what is the zenith to one is the nadir to the other. What Sterling himself thought of it, was strikingly expressed to his brother, Captain Anthony Sterling, by a comparison of his case 'to that of a young lady who has tragically lost her lover, and is willing to be half-hoodwinked into a convent, or in any noble or quasi-noble way to escape from a world which has become intolerable.' The truth seems to be, that Sterling went into orders under the combined influence of remorse for the share he had inadvertently

had in causing the disastrous fate of a near relative (Mr. Boyd, who was shot with Torrijos in Spain), and of a gradual disenchantment from trust in mere political schemes for the regeneration of mankind,—a disease more common to the genial young men of his time than of ours. That while in the exercise of his duties as a parish priest he was energetic, useful, and happy, the evidence in Mr. Hare's book is fully sufficient to shew. It is impossible to say whether his scepticism would have come upon him had he continued in that active career; but it is certainly a gratuitous supposition of Mr. Carlyle that the ill-health which put an end to it was only the outward and ostensible cause of its termination, and does not appear to be borne out by a single letter or expression of Sterling's own. Indeed, for years after he left Hurstmonceaux, he seemed to continue as firm in his attachment to Christianity as when he was there; though, on the other hand, it may well be doubted whether a man of Sterling's intellect, who would surrender his beliefs to Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, is likely in the present day to keep them under any conceivable circumstances. We think that Mr. Hare on the one hand has attributed too exclusive an influence to Sterling's forced inactivity, and Mr. Carlyle has certainly not taken it sufficiently into account as a determining cause of his scepticism.

But whatever subject Mr. Carlyle takes up, and whether he be right or wrong in his opinions, he is sure to write an interesting book. He is never wearisome, and whether his tale have been twice told or not, he clothes it by his original treatment with an attractive charm that few writers can lend even to an entirely new subject. The maxim of the author of *Modern Antiquity*, that

> True genius is the ray that flings
> A novel light o'er common things,

has seldom been better illustrated than by this life of Sterling. The facts are most of them neither new nor of a nature in themselves to excite any very strong interest, but the details of the life are told with such simplicity, and yet with such constant reference to the grand educational process which they collectively make up, that one seems listening to a narrative by Sterling's guardian angel, loving enough to sympathise in the smallest minutiæ, and wise enough to see in each of them the greatness of the crowning result. Nor is this impression in the least impaired by the insignificance of the sum total of Sterling's actual achievements. For had they been tenfold greater than they were, they would have been as nothing in the presence of that which Mr. Carlyle looks to as the soul's great achievement—

heroic nobleness of struggle and a calm abiding of the issue. After noticing the purity of Sterling's character, and his conformity to 'the so-called moralities,' his biographer goes on to say—

In clear and perfect fidelity to Truth wherever found, in childlike and soldierlike, pious and valiant loyalty to the Highest, and what of good and evil that might send him,—he excelled among good men. The joys and the sorrows of his lot he took with true simplicity and acquiescence. Like a true son, not like a miserable mutinous rebel, he comported himself in this Universe. Extremity of distress—and surely his fervid temper had enough of contradiction in this world—could not tempt him into impatience at any time. By no chance did you ever hear from him a whisper of those mean repinings, miserable arraignings and questionings of the Eternal Power, such as weak souls even well disposed will sometimes give way to in the pressure of their despair; to the like of this he never yielded, or showed the least tendency to yield;—which surely was well on his part. For the Eternal Power, I still remark, will not answer the like of this, but silently and terribly accounts it impious, blasphemous, and damnable, and now as heretofore will visit it as such. Not a rebel, but a son, I said; willing to suffer when Heaven said, Thou shalt;—and withal, what is perhaps rarer in such a combination, willing to rejoice also, and right cheerily taking the good that was sent, whensoever or in whatever form it came.

A pious soul we may justly call him; devoutly submissive to the will of the Supreme in all things; the highest and sole essential form which Religion can assume in man, and without which all forms of religion are a mockery and a delusion in man.

Every one not personally acquainted with Sterling

will feel that the great interest of the book is in the light thrown by it on Mr. Carlyle's own belief. For good or evil, Mr. Carlyle is a power in the country; and those who watch eagerly the signs of the times have their eyes fixed upon him. What he would have us leave is plain enough, and that too with all haste, as a sinking ship that will else carry us—state, church, and sacred property—down along with it. But whither would he have us fly? Is there firm land, be it ever so distant? or is the wild waste of waters, seething, warring round as far as eye can reach, our only hope?—the pilot-stars, shining fitfully through the parting of the storm-clouds, our only guidance? There are hearts in this land almost broken, whose old traditional beliefs, serving them at least as moral supports, Mr. Carlyle and teachers like him have undermined. Some betake themselves to literature, as Sterling did; some fill up the void with the excitement of politics; others feebly bemoan their irreparable loss, and wear an outward seeming of universal irony and sarcasm. Mr. Carlyle has no right, no man has any right, to weaken or destroy a faith which he cannot or will not replace with a loftier. We have no hesitation in saying, that the language which Mr. Carlyle is in the habit of employing towards the religion of England and of Europe is unjustifiable. He ought to have said

nothing, or he ought to have said more. Scraps of verse from Goethe, and declamations, however brilliantly they may be phrased, are but a poor compensation for the slightest obscuring of 'the hope of immortality brought to light by the gospel,' and by it conveyed to the hut of the poorest man, to awaken his crushed intelligence and lighten the load of his misery. Mr. Carlyle slights, after his contemptuous fashion, the poetry of his contemporaries. One of them has uttered in song some practical wisdom which he would do well to heed:

O thou that after toil and storm
  May'st seem to have reached a purer air,
  Whose faith has centre everywhere,
Nor cares to fix itself to form,

Leave thou thy sister, when she prays,
  Her early heaven, her happy views;
  Nor thou with shadowed hint confuse
A life that leads melodious days.

Her faith through form is pure as thine,
  Her hands are quicker unto good.
  Oh, sacred be the flesh and blood
To which she links a truth divine!

See thou, that countest reason ripe
  In holding by the law within,
  Thou fail not in a world of sin,
And even for want of such a type.

This life of Sterling will be useful to the class

whose beliefs have given way before Mr. Carlyle's destroying energies; because it furnishes hints, not to be mistaken though not obtrusive, as to the extent to which they must be prepared to go if they would really be his disciples. If the path has in its very dangers an attraction for some, while others are shudderingly repelled, in either case the result is desirable, as it is the absence of certainty which causes the pain and paralyses the power of action. At any rate, the doctrines of this teacher must be so much more intelligible to the mass when applied, as they are here, in commentary upon a life all whose details are familiar, because it is the life of a contemporary and a countryman, that all who read must inevitably be impressed with that great lesson of the philosophic poet,

> The intellectual power through words and things
> Goes sounding on, *a dim and perilous way.*

Though John Sterling is of course the principal figure in the composition, and Mr. Carlyle's treatment the great attraction of the book, yet the figures in the background will be those to make most impression on the general reader. Coleridge stands there in striking but caricatured likeness; and even his most devoted admirers will not be sorry to see a portrait of their master by such a hand; and all will curiously

observe the contrast between the sarcastic bitterness which colours the drawing of the philosophic Christian, and the kindly allowance through which the character of John Sterling's father, the famous 'Thunderer' of the *Times*, is delineated. We half suspect that Coleridge would have appeared to Mr. Carlyle a much greater man, if he had allowed him to declaim—'Harpocrates-Stentor,' as Sterling calls him—with trumpet voice and for time unlimited on the divine virtues of Silence. There are besides, as in all Mr. Carlyle's works, passages of wise thought expressed in most felicitous language; of which not the least important is this advice given to Sterling in reference to his poetic aspirations:

You can speak with supreme excellence; sing with considerable excellence you never can. And the Age itself, does it not, beyond most ages, demand and require clear speech; an Age incapable of being sung to, in any but a trivial manner, till these convulsive agonies and wild revolutionary overturnings readjust themselves? Intelligible word of command, not musical psalmody and fiddling, is possible in this fell storm of battle. Beyond all ages, our Age admonishes whatsoever thinking or writing man it has: Oh speak to me, some wise intelligible speech; your wise meaning, in the shortest and clearest way; behold, I am dying for want of wise meaning, and insight into the devouring fact; speak, if you have any wisdom! As to song so-called, and your fiddling talent—even if you have one, much more if you have none—we will talk of that a couple of centuries hence, when things are calmer again. Homer shall be thrice welcome; but only when Troy

is *taken:* alas, while the siege lasts, and battle's fury rages everywhere, what can I do with the Homer? I want Achilleus and Odysseus, and am enraged to see them trying to be Homers!

These bricks from Babylon convey but scanty intimation of the varied interest of the book. However the readers of it may differ from its opinions, they cannot but find, even in Mr. Carlyle's misjudgments and prejudices, ample matter for serious reflection; for if he misjudges, it is generally because he is looking too intently at a single truth, or a single side of a truth; and such misjudgments are more suggestive than the completest propositions of a less earnest, keen-sighted, and impassioned thinker. He is indeed more a prophet than a logician or a man of science. And one lesson we may all learn from this, as from everything he writes—and it is a lesson that interferes with no creed—that honesty of purpose, and resoluteness to do and to say the thing we believe to be the true thing, will give heart to a man's life, when all ordinary motives to action and all ordinary supports of energy have failed like a rotten reed.

'ESMOND.'

Esmond is an autobiographical memoir of the first five-and-thirty years of the life of an English gentleman of family, written in his old age after his retirement to Virginia; and edited with an introduction by his daughter, for the instruction and amusement of her children and descendants, and to give them a lively portrait of the noble gentleman her father. It is historical, inasmuch as political events enter both as motives to the actors and as facts influencing their fortunes, and because historical personages are brought upon the scene: both are necessary elements in the career of a gentleman and a soldier, but neither forms the staple or the main object of the book, which concerns itself with the characters and fortunes of the noble family of Castlewood, of which Henry Esmond is a member. The period embraced is from the accession of James the Second to the death of Queen Anne, and the manners depicted are those of

the English aristocracy. Archæology is not a special object with the author; though both costume, in its more limited sense, and manners, are, we believe, accurately preserved. But Wardour Street and the Royal Academy need fear no competitor in Mr. Thackeray. His business lies mainly with men and women, not with high-heeled shoes and hoops and patches, and old china and carved high-backed chairs. Nor have Mr. Macaulay's forthcoming volumes been anticipated, except in one instance, where the Chevalier St. George is brought to England, has an interview with his sister at Kensington just before her death, is absolutely present in London at the proclamation of George the First, and indeed only misses being James the Third, King of Great Britain and Ireland, by grace of his own exceeding baseness and folly. Scott, who had a reverence for the Stuarts impossible to Mr. Thackeray with his habit of looking at the actors in life from the side-scenes and in the green-room rather than from before the foot-lights, has not scrupled to take a similar liberty with his Chevalier in *Redgauntlet*, merely to arrange a striking tableau at the fall of the curtain. But these violations of received tradition with respect to such well-known historical personages, force upon the reader unnecessarily the fictitious character of the narrative, and are therefore better avoided.

There is abundance of incident in the book, but not much more plot than in one of Defoe's novels; neither is there, generally speaking, a plot in man's life, though there may be and often is in sections of it. Unity is given not by a consecutive and self-developing story, but by the ordinary events of life blended with those peculiar to a stirring time acting on a family group, and bringing out and ripening their qualities; these again controlling the subsequent events, just as happens in life. The book has the great charm of reality. The framework is, as we have said, historical; men with well-known names, political, literary, military, pass and repass; their sayings and doings are interwoven with the sayings and doings of the fictitious characters; and all reads like a genuine memoir of the time. The rock ahead of historical novelists is the danger of reproducing too much of their raw material; making the art visible by which they construct their image of a by-gone time; painting its manners and the outside of its life with the sense of contrast with which men of the present naturally view them, or looking at its parties and its politics in the light of modern questions: the rock ahead of Mr. Thackeray, in particular, was the temptation merely to dramatise his lectures; but he has triumphed over these difficulties, and Queen Anne's Colonel writes his life—and a very

interesting life it is—just as such a Queen Anne's Colonel might be supposed to have written it. We shall give no epitome of the story, because the merit of the book does not lie there, and what story there is readers like to find out for themselves.

Mr Thackeray's humour does not mainly consist in the creation of oddities of manner, habit, or feeling; but in so representing actual men and women as to excite a sense of incongruity in the reader's mind—a feeling that the follies and vices described are deviations from an ideal of humanity always present to the writer. The real is described vividly, with that perception of individuality which constitutes the artist; but the description implies and suggests a standard higher than itself, not by any direct assertion of such a standard, but by an unmistakeable irony. The moral antithesis of actual and ideal is the root from which springs the peculiar charm of Mr. Thackeray's writings; that mixture of gaiety and seriousness, of sarcasm and tenderness, of enjoyment and cynicism, which reflects so well the contradictory consciousness of man as a being with senses and passions and limited knowledge, yet with a conscience and a reason speaking to him of eternal laws and a moral order of the universe. It is this that makes Mr. Thackeray a profound moralist, just as Hogarth shewed his knowledge of perspective by

drawing a landscape throughout in violation of its rules. So, in Mr. Thackeray's picture of society as it is, society as it ought to be is implied. He could not have painted Vanity Fair as he has, unless Eden had been shining brightly in his inner eyes. The historian of 'snobs' indicates in every touch his fine sense of a gentleman or a lady. No one could be simply amused with Mr. Thackeray's descriptions or his dialogues. A shame at one's own defects, at the defects of the world in which one was living, was irresistibly aroused along with the reception of the particular portraiture. But while he was dealing with his own age, his keen perceptive faculty prevailed, and the actual predominates in his pictures of modern society. His fine appreciation of high character has hitherto been chiefly shewn (though with bright exceptions) by his definition of its contrary. But, getting quite out of the region of his personal experiences, he has shewn his true nature without this mask of satire and irony. The ideal is no longer implied, but realised, in the two leading characters of *Esmond*. The medal is reversed, and what appeared as scorn of baseness is revealed as love of goodness and nobleness; what appeared as cynicism is presented as a heart-worship of what is pure, affectionate, and unselfish. He has selected for his hero a very noble type of the cavalier softening

into the man of the eighteenth century, and for his heroine one of the sweetest women that ever breathed from canvas or from book since Raffaelle painted Maries and Shakspeare created a new and higher consciousness of woman in the mind of Germanic Europe. Colonel Esmond is indeed a fine gentleman,—the accomplished man, the gallant soldier, the loyal heart, and the passionate lover, whose richly contrasted but harmonious character Clarendon would have delighted to describe; while Falkland and Richard Lovelace would have worn him in their heart's core. Lucy Hutchinson's husband might have stood for his model in all but politics, and his Toryism has in it more than a smack of English freedom very much akin to that noble patriot's Republicanism. Especially does he recal Colonel Hutchinson in his lofty principle, his unswerving devotion to it, a certain sweet seriousness which comes in happily to temper a penetrating intellect, and a faculty of seeing things and persons as they are, to which we owe passage after passage in the book that it requires no effort to imagine Thackeray uttering himself in those famous lectures of his, and looking up with his kind glance to catch the delighted smile of his audience at his best points. Nor is there anything unartistic in this reminder of the author; for this quality of clear insight into men

and things, united with a kindly nature and a large capacity for loving, is not limited to any particular time or age, and combines with Colonel Esmond's other qualities so as to give no impression of incongruity. But besides the harmonising effect of this sweetly serious temperament, the record of Colonel Esmond's life is throughout a record of his attachment to one woman, towards whom his childish gratitude for protection grows with his growth into a complex feeling, in which filial affection and an unconscious passion are curiously blended. So unconscious, indeed, is the passion, that, though the reader has no difficulty in interpreting it, Esmond himself is for years the avowed and persevering though hopeless lover of this very lady's daughter. The relation between Esmond and Rachel Viscountess Castlewood is of that sort that nothing short of consummate skill could have saved it from becoming ridiculous or offensive, or both. In Mr. Thackeray's hands the difficulty has become a triumph, and has given rise to beauties which a safer ambition would have not dared to attempt. The triumph is attained by the conception of Lady Castlewood's character. She is one of those women who never grow old, because their lives are in the affections, and the suffering that comes upon such lives only brings out strength and beauty unperceived before. The graces

of the girl never pass away, but maturer loveliness is added to them, and spring, summer, autumn, all bloom on their faces and in their hearts at once. A faint foreshadowing of this character we have had before in Helen Pendennis; but she had been depressed and crushed in early life, had married for a home, certainly without passion; and her nature was chilled and despondent. Lady Castlewood has the development that a happy girlhood, and a marriage with the man she devoutly loves, can give to a woman; and her high spirit has time to grow for her support when it is needed. Even the weaknesses of her character are but as dimples on a lovely face, and make us like her the better for them, because they give individuality to what might else be felt as too ideal. Nothing can be more true or touching than the way this lady demeans herself when she finds her husband's affection waning from her; and Mr. Thackeray is eminently Mr. Thackeray in his delineation of that waning love on the one side, and the strength and dignity which the neglected wife gradually draws from her own hitherto untried resources, when she ceases to lean on the arm that was withdrawn, and discovers that the heart she had worshipped was no worthy idol. But to those who would think the mother 'slow' we can have no hesitation in recommending the daughter. Miss

Beatrix Esmond—familiarly and correctly termed 'Trix' by her friends—is one of those dangerous young ladies who fascinate every one, man or woman, that they choose to fascinate, but care for nobody but themselves; and their care for themselves simply extends to the continual gratification of a boundless love of admiration, and the kind of power which results from it.) If Miss Rebecca Sharpe had really been a Montmorency, and a matchless beauty, and a maid of honour to a Queen, she might have sublimated into a Beatrix Esmond. It is for this proud, capricious, and heartless beauty, that Henry Esmond sighs out many years of his life, and does not find out, till she is lost to him and to herself, how much he loves her 'little mamma,' as the saucy young lady is fond of calling Lady Castlewood. Beatrix belongs to the class of women who figure most in history, with eyes as bright and hearts as hard as diamonds, as Mary Stuart said of herself; and Mary Stuart and Miss Esmond have many points in common. Of her end we are almost disposed to say with Othello, 'The pity of it, Iago! O Iago! the pity of it!' Unlovely as she is because unloving, yet her graces are too fair to be so dragged through the dirt—that stream is too bright to end in a city sewer. But the tragedy is no less tragical for the tawdry comedy of its close. Life has no pity for the pitiless,

no sentiment for those who trample on love as a weakness.

These three characters are the most prominent in the book. With one or the other of the two women Henry Esmond's thoughts are almost always engaged; and it is to win the reluctant love of the daughter that he seeks distinction as a soldier, a politician, and finally a conspirator in behalf of the son of King James. In this threefold career, he has intercourse with Addison, Steele, and the wits; serves under Marlborough at Blenheim and Ramilies; is on terms of intimacy with St. John and the Tory leaders. A succession of Viscounts Castlewood figure on the scene, all unmistakeable English noblemen of the Stuart period. A dowager Viscountess is a more faithful than flattering portrait of a class of ladies of rank of that time. The Chevalier St. George appears oftener than once. The great Duke of Hamilton is about to make Beatrix his Duchess, when he is basely murdered in that doubly fatal duel with the execrable Lord Mohun, who had twelve years before slain, also in a duel, my Lord Viscount Castlewood, the father of Beatrix. The book has certainly no lack of incident; the persons come and go as on the scene of real life; and all are clearly conceived, and sketched or painted in full with no uncertain aim or faltering hand. To draw character has been the

predominant object of the author; and he has so done it as to sustain a lively interest and an agreeable alternation of emotions through a form of composition particularly difficult to manage without becoming soon tedious, or breaking the true conditions of the form. Mr. Thackeray has overcome not only this self-imposed difficulty, but one greater still, which he could not avoid—his own reputation. *Esmond* will, we think, rank higher as a work of art than either *Vanity Fair* or *Pendennis*; because the characters are of a higher type, and drawn with greater finish, and the book is more of a complete whole;—not that we anticipate for it anything like the popularity of the former of these two books, as it is altogether of a graver cast, the satire is not so pungent, the canvas is far less crowded, and the subject is distant and unfamiliar; and, may be, its excellences will not help it to a very large public.

The Spectator,
Nov. 6, 1852.

'MY NOVEL;

OR, VARIETIES OF ENGLISH LIFE.'

Mr. Caxton junior has, he informs us, written his novel with the twofold purpose of making up the deficit in his annual income caused by the repeal of the Corn-laws, and of doing his part to counteract the effect of incendiary publications by exhibiting the rural aristocracy, and generally the richer classes, in a truer and kindlier light than that which is thrown upon them by the dark lantern of Socialist, Radical, or Free-trade Diogenes. The second title of the work implies even a broader and more philosophic purpose. For while every English novel must represent varieties of English life, that which assumes to do this in a special sense must be intended to display the relations of one part of our social fabric to another, and to trace a wise design, a unity of aim, a complex harmony, in the whole

made up of these varieties. The first of Mr. Caxton's objects has doubtless been obtained; the other has not been accomplished either in its wider or its narrower sense. Mr. Caxton does not specify the dangerous works to which his own is designed to be an antidote; and he remarks in the course of it that it is easier to live down than to write down inflammatory class appeals. We are rejoiced to agree with him, that a kind-hearted sensible squire and a good parson are likely to do more in the reconcilement of classes than any books which he can write; and the more, because he seems not to have mastered the first element of success in his undertaking,—a knowledge of the mischief to be encountered, and of the causes which have produced it. It is not generally supposed that Socialist schemes or democratic rhetoric have found their way very extensively to the intellect and passions of the agricultural poor in England; nor, so far as landowners and parsons have been the objects of invective, has want of kindliness and benevolence been the vice attributed to them. Cordial good-nature and a frank dignity are the popular attributes of the 'good old English gentleman'; and had such qualities been sufficient to prevent what is called, by a rhetorical exaggeration, in this country at least, 'the war of classes,' that war would never have broken out.

But, unfortunately, these very country gentlemen—'our territorial aristocracy,' as Mr. Disraeli is fond of calling them—with all their virtues, had a natural tendency to high rents; and being in possession at one time of paramount legislative power, they passed laws which gave them artificially high rents at the expense of the rest of the community. This is the origin of what was certainly a combat between classes; but that is over now. How far English landowners have forgotten that property has its duties as well as its rights and enjoyments, is quite another question; and if Mr. Caxton wishes to go into it, he will find that fancy-portraits of a model squire and a model parson are but dust in the balance against the facts represented by the words, Rural pauperism, Rural ignorance, and Rural brutality. If he wants to know—as he seems to have rather a Pall Mall notion of country life—what these words mean, let him consult Sidney Godolphin Osborne and Charles Kingsley, who are both gentlemen and parsons working among the agricultural poor.

Granted that a good-natured squire, with eight thousand acres of land, arable and pasture, and not a mortgage on it, aided by a parson with a decent income—or even one who can give to the *res angusta domi* the dignity that high character, good manners, and intellectual accomplishments will

bestow—may do great things for a parish. The sagacious Mrs. Glasse prefaces her receipt for hare-soup by the pithy direction, first catch your hare. So, we say, first put your unencumbered well-meaning squire and phœnix parson in every parish in England, or in the majority of parishes, and then will be time enough to discuss what good may be got out of them. It is the burdened estates preventing improvement, and the parsons careless, sauntering, often with little more intellectual cultivation and much less practical knowledge and good sense than their farmers,—these are the things that constitute the circumstances with which we have to deal in too many of our country parishes, and which have borne fruit in the fearful triad, the consideration of which we recommended to Mr. Caxton's notice.

But our novelist does not seem to know what to do with his squire and parson when he has found or invented them. A considerable vagueness as to the daily life, business, enjoyments, and manners of an English village, must have come over the mind of Pisistratus while he was in Australia making the fortune which he, not prescient of Free-trade iniquities, was rash enough to invest in Uncle Rowland's acres; or, with the object he announces, he would certainly have given us some more definite picture of our sweet country life, with its immemorial

charms, and of the duties and pleasures of a great proprietor and a country rector, than is to be found in *My Novel*. We always thought it spoilt the energetic moral of *The Caxtons*, that Pisistratus should rush back to the old country the moment he had made a few thousand pounds. He ought to have become an Australian 'gentleman'; that would have had significance. But now that all his agricultural experience has not enabled him to invent a more novel or more useful function for a squire and his benevolence and his capital, than to set him employing labour during a hard season unproductively, in digging a fish-pond that he didn't want, we begin to suspect Pisistratus of being a charlatan, and that he neither knows nor cares much in his heart about agriculture, and country gentlemen, and the rural poor. It was not on the Palatine that Virgil heard the hum of the bees, or smelt the sweet thyme, whose music and fragrance have been for nearly two thousand years wafting the country—all brightness, melody, and perfume —into close chambers, into walled-up cities, into crowded streets, and dismal alleys; and it is not in Pall Mall that one can learn those secrets of the country which if reproduced in a book would breathe from its pages May-bloom and new-mown hay, calm delights, unwearying occupations, robust and ani-

mated health—not even in the country, if one carried thither a Pall Mall mind and heart. There is about Mr. Caxton's picture of Hazeldean and its master of the same name—Hazeldean of Hazeldean—the rhetorical vagueness and want of detail which betray the writer aiming at a generalisation but having no knowledge or vivid sense of the particulars; not that the sort of man is not well enough described—novels and London experience would serve for that—but there is no presentation of that country-gentleman life with its accessories which is necessary for the attainment of the author's professed purpose. Imagine a picture of our rural life with no tenant farmers, and this too by a man who professes to exhibit that life with a practical aim! But even the artist, were he of a high and conscientious intellect, could not omit so essential a feature of the moral rustic landscape. In fact, Mr. Hazeldean of Hazeldean is *described*; and his park and house, and wife and sister, and parish-stocks and parson and bailiff, are *described* too,—and as a picture of still-life we have no objection to the descriptions; what is wanting is action and dialogue bearing upon the main purpose of the book,—for of action and dialogue of the ordinary novel sort there is plenty, and amusing enough. The mere existence of such folks as our best country gentlemen and their families may be a startling

novelty to an American, or an Australian who has forgotten the old country; and rural discontent may seem to such a stranger at first sight unaccountable, though we are by no means sure that he would not fix upon that as its inevitable cause, with his colonial feelings about the relative value of independence and comfort. But one who pretends to be alive to the animosities of classes in England might know that he is contributing no novelty when he simply informs us of the existence of a cordial, manly, somewhat irritable, middle-aged gentleman, who is proud of his eight thousand acres, considers the landed interest identical with the constitution, but with all his pride and irritability, his prejudice and narrowness remembers that a Hazeldean of Hazeldean has duties, and does for 'his poor' all that his limited conscience and feeble inventive faculties suggest to him. These general characteristics of the country gentleman, as statistical facts, we are all familiar with. But our author fails both in his aim as social physician, and in dramatic presentation of his subject, when he contents himself with a vague general conception, and labels his *dramatis personæ*, instead of developing them in action. The Hazeldeans of Hazeldean have for hundreds of years influenced directly the villages in which they have lived and ruled, and have indirectly contributed peculiar elements to the national

character, and no slight bias to the national policy. To present this general truth dramatically would be to make it felt and appreciated more profoundly and by a wider circle, and is an aim worthy of an English gentleman and literary artist. But to do this, he must show his type of the class in action, as landlord, master, neighbour, sportsman, magistrate, a paternal despot in his village, a free and kindly man in his family, a gentleman and an aristocrat among his peers. For it is by action in all these and more capacities that the Hazeldeans of Hazeldean are what they are; not by being dummies, with all these titles painted up underneath them. And what makes *My Novel* a more striking failure is, that an active life of this range and variety is more capable and easy of artistic treatment than that of most workers among us would be, in proportion as it is at once less special and mechanical than that of the professional man, the merchant, the shopkeeper, and artificer, and less abstract than that of the statesman and politician. It deals on the one hand with natural objects and processes of production of vital importance to a nation, with agents, phenomena, and scenery, delightful to the imagination as well as interesting to the understanding; while on the other hand, it has to do with the government of men, on such a scale as to admit of that individualised

treatment which gives the direct human interest so difficult to realise in those legislative or administrative processes in which the masses are dealt with on broad generalisations, and regarded not so much as individual men, but as the constituent elements of blue-books and statistical tables. To shew all this living on the canvas, would indeed have been to do something for the order to which our author belongs by birth, estate, and county-membership. It would have been still more to the purpose to shew how these same Hazeldeans, worthy and loveable race though they are, are to develop into the landowners of a new era, and in increased knowledge, energy and enterprise, are not to lose the old charm of frankness, kindness, and pride of gentlemen; to make us feel how these country gentlemen may still be, as they ought to be from their position and antecedents, the leaders of agricultural improvement, the true aristocracy of an industrial people. But for all this, practical knowledge, and, what is more, genuine earnestness, would have been needed; and it was easier to write a novel of commonplace material dexterously constructed, and spiced with a proper amount of the old familiar sentiment and the new pseudo-Shandyism, which is the merest reflection from books.

If, leaving these country folks with the general

acknowledgment, that, so far as description can be a substitute for dialogue and action, they are well described, and nice points of character seized, and a pleasing impression of the Hazeldean family produced, we trace the purpose of the author in the other characters of the book—extending through four volumes, but in quantity nearly equalling three ordinary novels—we confess ourselves utterly puzzled to detect any difference as regards aim and philosophic depth between this and any other novel by the same author, or indeed any 'fashionable novel' of the day. We have in addition to the Hazeldeans, father, son, wife, and sister, and the parson and his wife, a Cabinet Minister burdened with a secret remorse; his friend Lord Lestrange, all that is charming, good, and elevated, but crushed and repressed by a regret dating twenty years back; a scheming young gentleman, a relative of the Cabinet Minister, and the villain of the piece; a semi-Jew baron, *ci-devant* solicitor, who lends money and lives in 'the first society,' and calls the Cabinet Minister 'my dear fellow'; an Italian nobleman in exile, with his daughter; another Italian nobleman and his sister, plotting against the former; a peasant poet, who wins his way to eminence, and turns out to be the legitimate son of a great man; an uncle by the mother's side of the poet, who returns from America

with a fortune, and becomes a manufacturer and finally a man of fashion and M.P. for a borough;—all these we have, and a very complex and interesting story is made out of their combinations; there are even scenes of great power, of the sort that Macready on the stage could have given prodigious effect to; but the purpose of the book seems clean gone out of the writer's mind, and we can conceive any novel of the season doing just as much and just as little to knit closer the ties that bind class to class in England, or to make one class appreciate and look with truer and kindlier eye on the others.

Indeed, there are characters in *My Novel*, and there is a pervading tone, which, so far from harmonising men of different degrees and different occupations in our land, seem to us calculated, if they had any practical effect, to do just the opposite. Mr. Sprott the tinker, whose pleasure it is gratuitously to enlighten his rustic brethren on the question of their rights and the wrongs of the rich, is not a flattering specimen of the poor man political. But let him pass as a sketch and a scarecrow. Mr. Richard Avenel, the maker of his own fortune, the manufacturer, and Radical borough M.P., may too be a portrait from life; we do not doubt that worse men and vulgarer men have sat and are sitting in the House of Commons: but he is still an outrageous

caricature, were he 'liker than life,' because he is presented here as the type of a class, and as the commercial analogue of the Hazeldeans of Hazeldean. He is the prosperous middle-class man, as he appears to the horrified vision of May Fair and Almacks; not even to those artificial eyes quite devoid of a certain rude strength and rough utility, but with all that, a singularly absurd, coarse, selfish, grasping, tyrannical, title-hunting, and unpleasant 'intrus.' Nor, broad as is the canvas spread, and facile as is the master's hand, does that great 'people,' without which English 'society' is a capital without a column, gain admission even to the background of the picture, except as a group of undistinguishable grumbling rustics in one corner, and a corrupt and equally undistinguishable borough constituency in another. A deep and inbred contempt for the middle class would be the only interpretation of a picture of English society which ignored or only sarcastically noticed them, were it not to be explained by a defect in this author's genius and sympathies, alike fatal to him as philosophic politician or as philosophic artist.

And this is, that of the English world, which it is his vocation to paint and to influence, he knows and comprehends and cares for only the lightest froth dancing on the surface. We have seen that in his

village he could conceive and describe his characters of squire and parson with their families; below this he could not even go by description, and he fails to exhibit even them as actors in the real interests of their lives. It is the same when his scene is transferred to London. Dandies and fine ladies—men and women upon whom life forces no serious duties, and who are not great enough to impose them on themselves—dress, talk, flirt, and intrigue upon his stage. Even the political life which is bound up in England with fashionable life he touches with the vaguest, dreamiest pencil, and as if none of the substantive interests and manly virtues with which it is concerned had ever made themselves felt by him. He can understand it as an exciting personal game, more absorbing and more reputable than hazard, with great prizes for those who can win them, and draughts of Nepenthe for those whose youth has left behind it little but gnawing regrets. But as the highest form of business, or the serious passion of serious men, and the duty of those whose rank and fortune release them from the ordinary duties of the less wealthy and eminent,—we do not mean to say that he cannot form the conception or use the phrases, but it is not that view of political life with which he sympathises, or which his genius aspires to represent among the varieties of English

life. Nor, indeed, apart from motives, does he dramatically represent the life of a political leader. Here again he can form the conception, describe the man; but his portrait wants details—that is, it wants knowledge, his statesman does nothing as a statesman. It cannot be in this case that life has presented no models to the writer. His manhood must have been passed in the familiar society of political Englishmen of the higher rank. It must be that his genius is not receptive of this sort of experience; that it presents to his imagination no beauty or interest; it is not available to him for purposes of art. Go even into a class with which he ought to be more familiar still, among the men of letters; we have in this book three distinct types from this class, —Leonard, the poet; Henry Norreys, the man who follows literature with the diligence and sobriety of a lawyer; and John Burley, the reckless, dissipated man of genius, who is always out at elbows, eloquently drunk, and dies of delirium tremens. The two latter are strongly marked types, and we know precisely the sort of men intended, if not the very men who sat for the portraits. But this is knowledge we bring to the book, not knowledge we get from it. There is little dramatic power in the representation; we easily fill up features so strongly marked, and we must not put down to the credit of

the artist what belong really to the subject and to our own familiarity with a class. Leonard, on the other hand, upon whom much more talk is lavished, remains in his poetical character a mere *nominis umbra*; not a characteristic of his genius is made real and intelligible to us; he cannot have been as poet and man of letters clearly and distinctly before the author's eye. Thus, even with those classes of society with which he must be familiar, he cannot deal dramatically; he has not the genius for presenting individual character, the primary dramatic faculty, much less the faculty—requiring so much study, observation, and superiority to conventional prejudices, in addition to dramatic genius—of presenting class characters individualised, the distinctive features of the man moulded and coloured by the work he does, representative therefore of the social function and peculiarities of their class, true typal varieties of English life. It is needless to add, that of the working lives—and that means the serious portion of the lives—of the merchant, the manufacturer, the lawyer, and other 'working classes,' not the faintest representation is conveyed. Baron Levy and Randal Leslie, who plot together against the fortunes of their fellow 'varieties,' are the only 'working men' really exhibited in that which is their business and function. In a word, it is only

the amusements, the pleasures, and the passions of the idle members of English society, which Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton has ever succeeded in painting. He cannot paint the busy classes, even in their pleasures, and their family life and their passions—not even those who belong to his 'society'—because the serious occupations and interests of men and women affect their pleasures and their passions; and with these and the characters they form he has no adequate acquaintance or sympathy. So, as we said, he paints the froth of society; and very gay froth it is, and very pretty bubbles he can make of it; but this is not reconciling classes, or giving a philosophic representation in fiction of the great organic being we call the English nation; and so far as *My Novel* pretends to be anything more than anybody else's novel, anything more than a well-wrought story, constructed out of the old Bulwer-Lytton materials, the pretence is fabulous and the performance does not answer to it. We have a novel neither better nor worse than its predecessors; but we have not a great work of art reared on a basis so broad as a general survey of English life in the earlier half of the nineteenth century.

Would such a work of art be possible? A mirror that should shew to a nation of workers—to a nation whose family hearth is dear and sacred, to a nation

that is earnest, practical, grave, and religious—its own life, complex and multitudinous, as it might reflect itself upon the imagination of a great poet, who to masculine understanding trained by observation and study should add the large heart and the clear eye to which nothing human is uninteresting or blank? Homer did something of this sort for the Greece of his day; Dante for the Italy of his; Shakspere for the Europe of his. These men knew no such words as 'commonplace' or 'low,' except as applied to what is stupid and base. The broad field of human life was to them a field of beauty, richly clothed with food and flowers for the sustenance and nourishment of a vigorous imagination. Art can indeed harmonise classes when the artist is such as these,—when, on the one hand, the dignity and worth of the various callings that minister to the convenience and promote the improvement of a nation are illustrated by viewing them as harmonious parts of a great whole; and on the other, when the men who pursue these callings are represented with the interesting varieties impressed upon the common humanity by circumstances and education, but still as not having that common humanity obliterated and replaced by some ludicrous or mean features, characteristic, it may be, of their occupation, but not characteristic of men to whom an occupation

should be a servant and not a master. Till art deals again as it did in its mighty youth with common life—with that which is the business of a busy struggling world—neither will art regain its strength and renew its youth, nor will common life reappear to us with the freshness and the sacredness which it had to the eye of those who first became self-conscious and burst into song. Dandy literature and superfine sensibilities are tokens and causes of a degenerate art and an emasculate morality; and among offenders in this way none has sinned more, or is of higher mark for a gibbet, than the author of *My Novel.* Such books as his, when they appear in their true characters, are judged according to one standard; but when they come in the guise of profound meaning and lofty aims, and give themselves the airs of being grand concrete philosophies, the judge looks at them in quite another light, tries them by a higher code, and condemns them accordingly, as well-dressed impostors.

The Spectator,
February 19, 1853.

'BLEAK HOUSE.'

'I BELIEVE I have never had so many readers,' says Mr. Dickens, in the preface to *Bleak House*, 'as in this book.' We have no doubt that he has the pleasantest evidence of the truth of this conviction in the balance-sheet of his publishing-account; and without any more accurate knowledge of the statistics of his circulation than the indications furnished by limited personal observation, we should not be surprised to find that *Punch* and the *Times* newspaper were his only rivals in this respect. Whatever such a fact may not prove, it does prove incontestably that Mr. Dickens has a greater power of amusing the book-buying public of England than any other living writer; and moreover establishes, what we should scarcely have thought probable, that his power of amusing is not weakened now that the novelty of his style has passed away, nor his public

wearied by the repetition of effects in which truth of nature and sobriety of thought are largely sacrificed to mannerism and point. Author and public react upon each other; and it is no wonder that a writer, who finds that his peculiar genius and his method of exhibiting it secure him an extensive and sustained popularity, should be deaf to the remonstrances of critics when they warn him of defects that his public does not care for, or urge him to a change of method which might very probably thin his audience for the immediate present, and substitute the quiet approval of the judicious for the noisy and profitable applause of crowded pit and gallery. Intellectual habits, too, become strengthened by use, and a period comes in the life of a man of genius when it is hopeless to expect from him growth of faculty or correction of faults.

Bleak House is, even more than any of its predecessors, chargeable with not simply faults, but absolute want of construction. A novelist may invent an extravagant or an uninteresting plot; may fail to balance his masses, to distribute his light and shade; may prevent his story from marching, by episode and discursion; but Mr. Dickens discards plot, while he persists in adopting a form for his thoughts to which plot is essential, and where the absence of a coherent story is fatal to continuous

interest. In *Bleak House*, the series of incidents which form the outward life of the actors and talkers has no close and necessary connexion; nor have they that higher interest that attaches to circumstances which powerfully aid in modifying and developing the original elements of human character. The great Chancery suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which serves to introduce a crowd of persons as suitors, lawyers, law-writers, law-stationers, and general spectators of Chancery business, has positively not the smallest influence on the character of any one person concerned; nor has it any interest of itself. Mr. Richard Carstone is not made reckless and unsteady by his interest in the great suit, but simply expends his recklessness and unsteadiness on it, as he would on something else if it were non-existent. This great suit is dragged in by the head and shoulders, and kept prominently before the reader, solely to give Mr. Dickens the opportunity of indulging in stale and commonplace satire upon the length and expense of Chancery proceedings, and exercises absolutely no influence on the characters and destinies of any one person concerned in it. The centre of the arch has nothing to do in keeping the arch together. The series of incidents which answers to what in an ordinary novel is called 'plot,' is that connected with the relationship of the heroine (again

analogically speaking) to her mother. Lady Dedlock, who when first introduced to the reader is a stately lady of the supremest fashion, has before her marriage with Sir Leicester Dedlock given birth to an illegitimate child, whom she supposes to have died in its birth, but who, under the name of Esther Summerson, was brought up in obscurity. The truth becomes known to her ladyship, and is ferreted out by the family solicitor, Mr. Tulkinghorn, a person of eminently respectable standing, but incomprehensible motives, who tortures Lady Dedlock with mysterious hints, and afterwards direct menaces of disclosing her shame to her husband; at which stage of the proceedings he is shot in his chambers. The reader is so artfully tempted to suspect Lady Dedlock of the deed, that all but the simplest will at once conclude that a theatrical surprise is meditated; and accordingly the real culprit turns out to be Lady Dedlock's French maid, whom Mr. Tulkinghorn had used in discovering the secret, and afterwards treated with harshness and contumely that roused her malignant temper to a murderous revenge. The secret, however, is not buried with Mr. Tulkinghorn; and, maddened by fear of discovery and open shame, Lady Dedlock flies from her home, and dies of exhaustion at the entrance of a wretched city churchyard, where her lover was buried, and where she is found by her

daughter and a detective policeman who had been sent in quest of her. Literally, we have here given the whole of what can by any stretch of the term be called the main plot of *Bleak House*. And not only is this story both meagre and melodramatic, and disagreeably reminiscent of that vilest of modern books, Reynolds's *Mysteries of London*, but it is so unskilfully managed that the daughter is in no way influenced either in character or destiny by her mother's history; and the mother, her husband, the prying solicitor, the French maid, and the whole Dedlock set, might be eliminated from the book without damage to the great Chancery suit, or perceptible effect upon the remaining characters. We should then have less crowd, and no story; and the book might be called *Bleak House, or the Odd Folks that have to do with a long Chancery Suit.* This would give an exact notion of the contents of a collection of portraits embracing suitors, solicitors, law-writers, law-stationers, money-lenders, law-clerks (articled and not articled), with their chance friends and visitors, and various members of their respective families. Even then, a comprehensive *etcætera* would be needed for supernumeraries. So crowded is the canvas which Mr. Dickens has stretched, and so casual the connexion that gives to his composition whatever unity it has, that a

daguerreotype of Fleet Street at noon-day would be the aptest symbol to be found for it; though the daguerreotype would have the advantage in accuracy of representation. In addition to all other faults of construction, the heroine is made to tell her adventures in an autobiographic narrative; and as this would not suffice, under the conditions of a mortal existence limited to one spot in space at a time, for the endless array of persons who have to talk and be funny and interesting, the writer intercalates chapters in his own person,—a mixture which has the awkwardest effect, and is left in its natural awkwardness with no appliances of literary skill to help it out.

The result of all this is, that *Bleak House* would be a heavy book to read through at once, as a properly constructed novel ought to be read. But we must plead guilty to having found it dull and wearisome as a serial, though certainly not from its want of cleverness or point. On the contrary, almost everybody in the book is excessively funny that is not very wicked or very miserable. Wright and Keeley could act many of the characters without alteration of a word; Skimpole must be constructed with an especial eye to the genius of Mr. Charles Matthews; O. Smith will, of course, choose Krook or the sullen bricklayer, but probably the former,

for his effective make-up, and the grand finale by spontaneous combustion,—which, however Nature and Mr. Lewes may deride in the pride of intellect, the resources of the Adelphi will unquestionably prove possible;—the other characters of the piece would be without difficulty distributed among ladies and gentlemen familiar to the London boards. By all which is implied, that Mr. Dickens selects in his portraiture exactly what a farce-writer of equal ability and invention would select,—that which is coarsely marked and apprehended at first sight; that which is purely outward and no way significant of the man, an oddity of feature, a trick of gesture or of phrase, something which an actor can adequately present and in his presentation exhaust the conception. And this tendency to a theatrical method shews itself again in the exaggerated form which his satire assumes, and which even when the satire is well directed robs it of its wholesome effect. The theatre is obliged to drive its points home, or they would be lost; the majority of our actors want skill to present a character coloured and drawn true to nature, and a London mixed audience would not appreciate the exquisite art that disdained coarse exaggeration. But the gross caricature of the stage is unbearable in the study. We read with some other purpose than to laugh; and if the Harold Skimpoles and Mrs.

Jellybys of the novel are supremely ridiculous, we only refer to their counterparts in real life to note that the artist has failed in his execution, and has yet to learn by a deeper study of Nature how cunningly she blends motives, and how seldom men and women are entirely absurd or selfish without a glimmering and uneasy consciousness that all is not quite as it should be.

The love of strong effect, and the habit of seizing peculiarities and presenting them instead of characters, pervade Mr. Dickens's gravest and most amiable portraits, as well as those expressly intended to be ridiculous and grotesque. His heroine in *Bleak House* is a model of unconscious goodness; sowing love and reaping it wherever she goes; diffusing round her an atmosphere of happiness, and a sweet perfume of a pure and kindly nature. Her unconsciousness and sweet humility of disposition are so profound that scarcely a page of her autobiography is free from a record of these admirable qualities. With delightful *naïveté* she writes down the praises that are showered upon her on all hands; and it is impossible to doubt the simplicity of her nature, because she never omits to assert it with emphasis. This is not only coarse portraiture, but utterly untrue and inconsistent. Such a girl would not write her own memoirs, and certainly would not bore one with

her goodness till a wicked wish arises that she would either do something very 'spicy,' or confine herself to superintending the jam-pots at Bleak House. Old Jarndyce himself, too, is so dreadfully amiable and supernaturally benevolent, that it has been a common opinion during the progress of the book, that he would turn out as great a rascal as Skimpole; and the fox on the symbolical cover with his nose turned to the East wind has been conjectured by subtle intellects to be intended for his double. We rejoice to find that those misanthropical anticipations were unfounded; but there must have been something false to general nature in the portrait that suggested them —some observed peculiarity of an individual presented too exclusively, or an abstract conception of gentleness and forbearance worked out to form a sharp contrast to the loud, self-assertive, vehement, but generous and tender Boythorne. This gentleman is one of the most original and happiest conceptions of the book, a humourist study of the highest merit. Mr. Tulkinghorn, the Dedlock confidential solicitor, is an admirable study of mere outward characteristics of a class; but his motives and character are quite incomprehensible, and we strongly suspect that Mr. Dickens had him shot out of the way as the only possible method of avoiding an enigma of his own setting which he could not solve. Tulkinghorn's

fate excites precisely the same emotion as the death of a noxious brute. He is a capital instance of an old trick of Mr. Dickens, by which the supposed tendencies and influences of a trade or profession are made incarnate in a man, and not only is 'the dyer's hand subdued to what it works in,' but the dyer is altogether eliminated, and his powers of motion, his shape, speech, and bodily functions, are translated into the dye-tub. This gives the effect of what some critics call marvellous individuality. It gives distinctness, at any rate, and is telling; though it may be questionable whether it is not a more fatal mistake in art than the careless and unobservant habit which many writers have of omitting to mark the effect of occupations upon the development and exhibition of the universal passions and affections. Conversation Kenge and Vholes, solicitors in the great Jarndyce case, have each their little characteristic set of phrases, and are well-marked specimens of the genus lawyer; but as they only appear in their professional capacity we are not entitled to question them as to their qualities as men.

The allied families of Jellyby and Turveydrop are in Dickens' happiest vein, though Mrs. Jellyby is a coarse exaggeration of an existing folly. They may, we think, stand beside the Micawbers. Mrs. Jellyby's daughter Caddy is the only female in the

book we thoroughly relish: there is a blending of pathos and fun in the description of her under the tyranny of Borrioboola Gha that is irresistible; and her rapid transformation from a sulky, morose, overgrown child, to a graceful and amiable young woman, under the genial influence of Esther Summerson, is quite Cinderella-like, and as charming as any fairy tale. Inspector Bucket, of the Detective Force, bears evidence of the careful study of this admirable department of our Police by the editor of *Household Words*; and, as in the case of Kenge and Vholes, the professional capacity is here the object, and we do not require a portraiture of the man and his affections. Poor Jo, the street-sweeping urchin, is drawn with a skill that is never more effectively exercised than when the outcasts of humanity are its subjects,—a skill which seems to depart in proportion as the author rises in the scale of society depicted. Dickens has never yet succeeded in catching a tolerable likeness of man or woman whose lot is cast among the high-born and wealthy. Whether it is that the lives of such present less that is outwardly funny or grotesque, less that strikes the eye of a man on the look-out for oddity and point, or that he knows nothing of their lives, certain it is that his people of station are the vilest daubs; and Sir Leicester Dedlock,

Baronet, with his wife and family circle, are no exceptions.

If Mr. Dickens were now for the first time before the public, we should have found our space fully occupied in drawing attention to his wit, his invention, his eye for common life, for common men and women, for the every-day aspect of streets and houses, his tendency to delineate the affections and the humours rather than the passions of mankind; and his defects would have served but to shade and modify the praises that flow forth willingly at the appearance among us of a true and original genius. And had his genius gone on growing and maturing, clearing itself of extravagance, acquiring art by study and reflection, it would not be easy to limit the admiration and homage he might by this time have won from his countrymen. As it is, he must be content with the praise of amusing the idle hours of the greatest number of readers; not, we may hope, without improvement to their hearts, but certainly without profoundly affecting their intellects or deeply stirring their emotions. Clever he undoubtedly is; many of his portraits excite pity, and suggest the existence of crying social sins; but of almost all we are obliged to say that they border on and frequently reach caricature, of which the essence is to catch a striking likeness by exclusively selecting and

exaggerating a peculiarity that marks the man but does not represent him. Dickens belongs in literature to the same class as his illustrator, Hablot Browne, in design, though he far surpasses the illustrator in range and power.

The Spectator,
Sept. 24, 1853.

'WESTWARD HO!'

Mr. KINGSLEY has secured the first requisite of success as a novelist, by choosing an interesting subject, which both excites and justifies the powers of art and genius expended upon it. If it has been at times necessary to protest against the application of the principle of *cui bono* to works of art, it has been because the application has been improperly made, the principle wrongly or narrowly interpreted, not because art is exempt from the necessity of being available for something higher than the pastime of inactive minds and jaded energies. To make us wiser and larger-hearted; to conduct us through a wider range of experience than the actual life of each generally permits; to make us live in the lives of other types of character than our own, or than those of our daily acquaintance; to enable us to pass by sympathy into other minds and other circum-

stances, and especially to train the moral nature by sympathy with noble characters and noble actions; —these are the high aims of fiction in the hands of its master wielders; these are the aims which have raised novels and dramas to an importance which Nature herself indicates in assigning to their production those powers which the consent of all ages allows to rank supreme among the gifts of the human race.

Mr. Kingsley's object is to paint the types of character, and the sort of training, by which England rose in the reign of Queen Elizabeth to be mistress of the seas, and a model to all Europe of material prosperity and national unity—a powerful, a wealthy, a free, and a happy people. He does not, of course, attempt any such absurd impossibility as to epitomise in the fortunes and career of a single man or family the infinitely complex elements and agencies that go to make up the life of a nation at any one time; nor does he select the central Government, with its Court, its Administration, and its Parliament, and write a political novel to illustrate the policy of Elizabeth, and the various wisdom and talents of her Ministers, with the hearty yet perfectly independent action of the national assembly. He takes as his type of Elizabethan character and activity a Devonshire youth, of good birth, and in no

way distinguished from other sons of country gentlemen by either fortune, or learning, or genius, but of great bodily strength, of lively affections and sweet temper, combined with a marked propensity to combat from his earliest years; a character that when trained to self-denial and a high sense of duty to God and his country, and practised in the arts of war and seamanship, presents perhaps as perfect a specimen of glorious manhood as men have ever obeyed with implicit confidence and women worshipped as their natural liege lord and defender. Beside Amyas Leigh stand grouped his brother Frank, charmingly contrasted with him in all points except his pure and warm affections and chivalrous honour; and his mother, a saintly lady, whom early experience of calamity has sobered down to perfect serenity, and whom later sorrow and bereavement transfigure to almost unearthly intensity of faith, love, and resignation. The worthies of Devon—Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Richard Grenville, Admirals Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake; families whose names are still the bright stars of the West—Fortescues, Chichesters, Carys—blend in the action and interest of the scene. Burghers of Bideford, plotting Jesuits, Romanist country families, mariners who have sailed round the world with Drake, mariners who have seen Columbus and Cabot and Vasco de Gama, country

parsons, gentlemen adventurers, Spanish dons, South American Indians, and victims of the Inquisition, crowd the story with variety of character and incident. The scene itself spreads out from Bideford, near which is the family seat of the Leighs, through North and South Devon, to London in a passing glance; to Ireland and its wars, in which Amyas takes a distinguished part; to the Spanish main, and the boundless South American continent, where indeed the most interesting part of the adventures take place; back again to Bideford and Plymouth; whence Amyas sails in command of his ship, to take part in that most memorable sea-fight, the twelve days' battle, in which the Spanish Armada was chased from Plymouth round the south and east coasts of England, and finally broke, fled, or went to the bottom, some escaping to Norway, a few under Medina-Sidonia back to Spain; and England was saved, and the long dream of Spanish ambition and Popish vengeance dispelled for ever. Through all this variety of incident and character Mr. Kingsley never flags, never becomes wearisome. His men and women live in his pages, talk life and not book; and our sympathies move with them, so that, as in life, we do not impatiently look for the issue, but take an ever new interest in the details of the progress towards the issue. There may be differences

of opinion as to the estimate Mr. Kingsley has formed of particular men of the age; there certainly will be opposition elicited by some of his opinions on the religious manifestations of that age; Papist and Puritan will scoff almost alike at his estimate of the Church-of-Englandism of that day; and while the Dissenter of to-day has little reason to quarrel with the novelist for embodying Elizabethan Puritanism in such a stern warrior, admirable seaman and gunner, true comrade, Spaniard-hating and God-fearing Englishman, as Salvation Yeo of Clovelly, we are not disposed to accept Mr. Kingsley's types as expressive of any but one and that the worst form of Romanism in the age he depicts. But this is not so much unfairness on his part, as a necessity of his story, which leads him to deal with plotting Jesuits, seminary priests, and Spanish-American bishops and inquisitors, rather than with the body of English Catholic gentry, to whose loyalty he bears high and notoriously well-deserved testimony. Still, the result is a somewhat jarring sense of a partial representation in this respect, which we wish the constructive skill of the writer had been employed to obviate; though we would not, for any breadth of charity or comprehensive philosophy, lose or weaken the intensity of his conviction that the Protestant cause in that day was the cause of God, of freedom,

of English nationality, of American United States, and of all which has made Europe different from what it would have become had the Spanish dream of universal empire and the destruction of Protestantism been realised. It was this conviction that was at the root of the heroism of our land in that day, and it is the reflective glow of this conviction that gives its spirit-stirring trumpet tone to Mr. Kingsley's representation of that heroism.

We began by saying that Mr. Kingsley had chosen his theme well, because of its interest at any time to us Englishmen, descendants of the heroes of the Armada. But just now it seems especially opportune that we should look back for practical lessons, for encouragement, direction, and warning, to an age when great actions seemed the spontaneous instinct of the community, and success rose to the amplest range of aspiration. If miracles were wrought then, they were wrought by men using human means, under that agency which will always work miracles; under the inspiration of a faith in righteousness being the law and order of the world; of a manful resolution to dare everything for the right; of a prudence to judge of means; of a gallant spirit to hold life and labour and pain all well spent in the service of their country, and in the cause of God, freedom, and human happiness. The same

spirit, employing means and mechanical skill of which Elizabeth's heroes never dreamed in their wildest aspirations, will again produce proportionate results. But we talk of righteousness and faith in God, and believe in mechanical forces calculable by measurement and arithmetic; we talk of genius and strong will, and believe in routine and a system of mutual check; we believe in these, or rather we have no belief in anything, and this is the expression of our unbelief, our incapacity, our helplessness, our despair. Welcome war, welcome pestilence, welcome anything that will rouse the once noble English nation from this paralysis of true human, true national life; that will force us once more to seek out clear heads and brave hearts, and thank God, as for His choicest gifts, for men who will work themselves, and govern us and teach us to work; for men like those worthies 'whom,' as Mr. Kingsley says in a hearty dedication of his book to the Bishop of New Zealand and Rajah Sir James Brooke, 'Elizabeth, without distinction of rank or age, gathered round her in the ever-glorious wars of her great reign.'

Westward Ho! partakes much more of the character of biography and history than of the ordinary sentimental novel. Love plays a great part in the progress of the story, as it does in the lives of most men; but it is as motive influencing character and

determining action that it is exhibited, not as itself the sole interest of life, the single feeling which redeems human existence from dulness and inward death. The love which acts on the career and character of Amyas Leigh does not spend itself in moonlight monologues or in passionate discourses with its object; nor does the story depend for its interest upon the easily roused sympathy of even the stupidest readers with the ups and downs, the fortunes and emotions, of a passion common in certain degrees and certain kinds to all the race. It is no such narrow view of life that is presented here, but rather that broad sympathy with human action and human feeling in its manifold completeness which gives to art a range as wide as life itself, and throws a consecrating beauty over existence from the cradle to the grave, wherever human affections act, wherever human energies find their object and their field, wherever the battle between right and wrong, between sense and spirit, is waged,—wherever and by whatever means characters are trained, principles strengthened, and humanity developed. And this comprehensive character—displaying itself in assigning its true relative value to each thing—we take to be the distinguishing test of high art, and that which marks it out from all mere sentimentalism, prettiness, eclecticism, or whatever other name we

may give to man's attempts to reduce Nature to some standard of his own taste, or the taste of a particular age or clique, instead of endeavouring to enlarge his heart and open his eyes to see and feel the wonders and the splendours which are poured down from heaven on earth, in the least of which as in the greatest the Infinite reveals Himself for those who through the letter can penetrate to the spirit.

The Spectator,
March 17, 1855.

'NOCTES AMBROSIANÆ.'

MANY of the causes which contributed to the interest excited by the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, on their first appearance in successive numbers of *Blackwood's Magazine*, have ceased to operate. Political measures round which parties were then struggling with fierce passion and loud mutual denunciation have been built as firmly into the constitution as Magna Charta itself. The men engaged in those conflicts have become historical personages, or have fallen into utter oblivion; in either case escaping from the partial judgments of that time, and no longer lending a charm not its own to panegyric or invective. So too, the literary celebrities of that day have either attained a fixed rank or been forgotten; we no longer interest ourselves in disputes about their claims. And in the case of both political and literary personages, what was then fresh and piquant personality has become

familiar history or stale gossip; pointed allusions have lost their force, half-revelations have been surperseded; and we wonder, as we read, at the amount of feeling exhibited towards men and women who are now, for the most part, shadowy names, with scarce an association connecting them with our living sympathies. Yet, in spite of this inevitable effect of the lapse of twenty or thirty years upon papers discussing so largely topics and people of temporary interest, such is the high quality of the genius lavished upon them, that the public will read by far the larger portion of the *Noctes* with as much delight as at first. They appear now with a claim to rank as English classics,—as the choicest production of their author, one of the most highly endowed men of his time. Their chief interlocutor, the eidolon of the Ettrick Shepherd, is ranked by Professor Wilson's admirers with the most forcible characters known to us through history or created by fiction. Thus, Professor Ferrier, introducing the *Noctes* with a preface, says—'In wisdom, the Shepherd equals the Socrates of Plato; in humour, he supasses the Falstaff of Shakspere; clear and prompt, he might have stood up against Dr. Johnson in close and peremptory argument; fertile and copious, he might have rivalled Burke in amplitude of declamation.' Socrates, Falstaff, Dr. Johnson, and Burke, all in

one! and that one talking a broad Doric, that seems to an English ear the native dialect of humour, plastic alike to pathos, fun, and homely shrewdness; a shepherd, too, knowing all the shy charms of Nature in remotest haunts of solitude and silence—all the racy characteristics of pastoral life and pastoral people, their joys, their sorrows, their pleasures, and their business. Estimated thus, the Shepherd of the *Noctes* would really be the most marvellous of the creations of that literature which stands highest among the literatures of Europe for its presentation of human character. And, with some qualification, the estimate is not so absurd as at first sight our habitual reverence for such names as Professor Ferrier has brought into his comparison would consider it.

The truth is, that Wilson, one of the most remarkable men that ever lived, for the variety and strength of his powers, has thrown into the Shepherd's talk the teeming activity of his own mind and heart; and so far as characters are displayed in life, and in that fiction which reflects life, solely by their desultory talk, the Shepherd may fairly be matched with any one. If it was simply as a shrewd talker that we knew Socrates, if Falstaff was to us simply a sayer of good things, Dr. Johnson a hard hitter in argument, Burke a copious and

splendid declaimer—Wilson's Shepherd might without exaggeration be put upon a level with all these remarkable characters. He talks as shrewdly as Socrates, as wittily as Falstaff, as weightily as Johnson, as splendidly as Burke; or, at least, the exaggeration of such assertions might pass without challenge. He does talk more shrewdly, wittily, weightily, and splendidly than any man we have the pleasure of knowing. But the talk of these famous personages is all related to action or serious discussion; is the genuine utterance of the men in contact with facts, either engaged in the business of life or in the pursuit of truth. Something more is revealed by it than a kaleidoscope quickness and variety of intellect; it displays at once, and subserves, the will and the affections. Socrates talks cleverly, and gets his opponent generally into chancery—a feat which would raise him to the rank of a first-rate sophist; but we value him for his genuine earnestness in pursuit of truth, his plainness, his fearlessness, his candour, his pure and aspiring soul—dialectic is simply his instrument. Falstaff is witty, but not wittier than Sheridan or Hook; what we admire in him is the profound sincerity of his sensual abasement—the devotion of the whole man, wit, understanding, reason, conscience, to the pleasures of the animal man—his utter insensibility to the

higher claims and enjoyments of his humanity; it is a character, not a talker, that delights us in the fat knight. So in Johnson, and Burke, the talk is merely instrumental, symptomatic of a whole man talking. But in the Shepherd of the *Noctes* the talk is the be-all and the end-all; the man is a talker and little else; and we identify him with his talk almost as little as we do an actor with his part. This is partly owing to the form adopted; desultory talk *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis* can never thoroughly develop a character, can do nothing but shew a man's versatility of intellect and command of language. But it is also owing to the fact that one of the Shepherd's traits is the queerest and most grotesque vanity, almost the only trait borrowed from the original model; and that he is throughout represented as talking for effect, to shew off his eloquence. We have not, consequently, a character completely developed, but merely a man who can assume all characters for the nonce; can be funny, pathetic, wise, descriptive, poetical, or sensual, just as the play requires. And he is so palpably acting that he tires us by his cleverness of assumption, just as a hired mountebank would tire us by insisting on shewing off his powers of mimicry in conversation.

Another objection to the *Noctes* as a whole may be conveyed in the words of Mr. Foster, who, in his

admirable life of Goldsmith, says—'Of the many clever and indeed wonderful writings that from age to age are poured forth into the world, what is it that puts upon the few the stamp of immortality, and makes them seem indestructible as Nature?—what is it but their wise rejection of everything superfluous?' We estimate works of art, as we estimate characters in life, more by their unity and completeness than by their richness and profusion of raw material. It is coherence, order, purpose, which make the difference between Nature and Chaos. And if all the wit, the wisdom, the geniality, and the imagination of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* fail to secure them a place among English classics, it will be because these are reduced to no order, subordinated to no general purpose, organised into no whole. They will even then remain the very best magazine papers that were probably ever written.

The Spectator,
November 24, 1855.

COMTE'S 'POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY.'

THE *Cours de Philosophie Positive* is at once a compendious cyclopædia of science and an exhibition of scientific method. It defines rigorously the characteristics of the several orders of phenomena with which the particular sciences are concerned, arranges them in an ascending scale of complexity and specialty—beginning with mathematics and ending with social physics or sociology—and assigns to each science its proper method in accordance with the nature of the phenomena to be investigated. The connexion between the sciences thus arranged is, that the laws of each preceding order of phenomena are operative in that which succeeds, but in combination with a new order of laws, the study of which constitutes the advanced science. As might be supposed, the sciences have historically developed themselves in accordance with this

arrangement, the simpler and more general first, the more complex and special afterwards. Thus we obtain not only a lucid and rational classification, but a logical genealogy and an historical law of evolution, forming a sure basis for education and a luminous indication of future progress. An arrangement so simple in its principle, so fruitful in its results, one may well be astonished at having had so many ages to wait for. It is, however, unquestionable that, though half-formed suggestions of such a classification are here and there to be found, and though Hegel in particular, proceeding on a totally different method, has reached an arrangement that superficially resembles M. Comte's, yet to the latter belongs the honour of having thoroughly worked out the conception, of having rigorously determined and decisively constituted the filiation, of having exhibited the relations between phenomena and method, and finally of having accurately conceived and initiated the crowning science of sociology, with its two departments of social statics and social dynamics, dealing, the one with the conditions of the stability of human societies, the other with the laws of their progress. Because it is not merely a cyclopædia of scientific facts, but an exhibition of the methods of human knowledge and of the relations between its different branches, M. Comte

calls his work philosophy; and because it limits itself to what can be proved, he terms it positive philosophy.

That during the twenty years since the appearance of the first volume of the original work, it has powerfully influenced the thoughts and writings of the most exact minds engaged in speculation in this country, will be doubtful to no one who compares the books published on the general principles and mutual relations of science before and since its appearance. That it has given a far more special and directing impulse to those writers than most of them have been or would be willing publicly to avow, is Miss Martineau's opinion, and one of her motives —a highly honourable one—for presenting a translation of the original work to the English public. The motive assigned by Miss Martineau for this assumed reluctance to credit Comte with his due share of influence, is one likely enough to have prevailed with all English writers who were not very far above the common level in moral courage, or very far below it in insolent bravado and conceited contempt for the opinions and sympathies of their countrymen. For M. Comte's book, besides being, as we have described it, a treatise on science and scientific methods, is also a fierce polemic against theology and metaphysics, with all the notions and

sentiments that have their roots in them, all the beliefs and hopes which are considered, among us, if not the foundations, at least indispensable supports of morality. M. Comte scornfully denounces theism and atheism as equally unwarrantable intrusions into a province beyond the faculties, and barren for the needs of man; he treats our hope of a life beyond the grave as a childish chimera; mind he scouts as a metaphysical entity, on a level with the 'occult causes' of the schoolmen; Him, whom other men worship as the source and sustainer of their own lives, and of all the powers at work around them, he treats as a poor old dethroned Fetish—a *roi fainéant*, kept up, like the descendant of the Great Mogul, from unmeaning habit of accustomed reverence, or the idle prejudices and selfish interests of metaphysicians and theologians—a useless ceremonial, from which all power has been transferred to positive laws, and all glory to their discoverers. In the universe of man and the worlds he resolves to see only a vast consensus of forces, an infinite whirl and rush of phenomena, of which we can learn by observation the uniform coexistences and sequences, but know not, nor need to know, whence they flashed into being, what power sustains them, or what their mighty movements mean. What appears, we may and should investigate; to what is, we have no

access, no ascertainable relation. M. Comte aims, in fact, not simply at renovating science by reforming its general conceptions and completing its range, but at rigidly limiting human beliefs and speculations, and on the basis of demonstrable knowledge of phenomena constituting a reformed order of practical life and society. It was long ago said by one of our most brilliant living wits, 'There is no God, and Miss Martineau is his prophet'; and it therefore excites no surprise that the same pretensions, which are supposed to have deterred other English writers from acknowledging their obligation to the French philosopher, should have induced her to undertake the laborious task of translating and condensing his six bulky volumes into two. She sees in his strict limitation of the human faculties to phenomenal knowledge—in his treatment of all that cannot be demonstrated by sensible experience as chimeras—a means not otherwise procurable of remedying the intellectual anarchy of her country, or reinstating firm beliefs and impregnable principles in religion, morals, and politics, and so putting a final check upon the spread of weak and inconsistent practice, general faintness of heart and uncertainty of mind. For she too thinks that all the old beliefs and philosophies were but leading-strings and baby-jumpers for our race; that they have long encumbered

the movements of the growing boy, and must be cleared off—sent abroad, perhaps, for the aborigines of Australia and Terra del Fuego, who have yet to pass through the phases of Western Europe, though the duration of the crisis may be materially abridged for them by the influence of the nations which have preceded them in the course of human evolution.

It is these pretensions of the positive philosophy with which alone we profess to deal, because it is of these alone that there can be any dispute amongst competent persons. If observation of phenomena is our sole source of knowledge, no one questions but that the 'inductive canons' are the guides to accurate observation and the rules of safe generalisation. The assumption is, however, somewhat extensive; and M. Comte nowhere attempts to demonstrate this fundamental position of his system, unless it is demonstration to assert that theology and metaphysics have been barren speculations, whereas positive science has gone on from age to age extending its domain and adding to men's practical and demonstrable knowledge. This, however, our space will not allow us to discuss. Nor can we do more even with respect to these pretensions than to speak of some preliminary considerations which lie in the way of their admission. As a series of treatises on

the various sciences, M. Comte's work might be full of errors of detail without much impairing its value as a philosophic classification; and in fact, with respect to all but the simple sciences, even if it had been without blemish at the time of its publication, years are so rapidly developing our knowledge that it could have retained its perfection only a short time. As a treatise on method, it falls so far short of Mr. J. S. Mill's *Logic* in exhaustive treatment and in clear terse style, and has besides been so ably criticised by him in various parts of that admirable work, that it is superfluous to point out its special defects to the English student of philosophy. In spite of antiquated details and of special defects, however, the work will always retain a most distinguished place in the history of opinion; and to it must the student resort who shall hereafter wish to see the form which the science of social physics acquired in the hands of its first rigorously positive investigator. We have simply to inquire what its great claims are to supply the place of those theological and metaphysical beliefs and sentiments which it proposes to supersede; what support it can lend to moral principles and noble conduct, equivalent to the aids of which it would deprive us.

It is not unlikely that a preliminary objection would ordinarily be taken against the pretensions

of Positivism to exclude all other motives to action, and other grounds of assurance, in the fact that except for the simpler sciences, from geometry to chemistry —physiology rapidly advancing to meet them—it is as yet in its infancy, and has no body of doctrine to substitute for what it displaces. A Positivist would answer to this, that conscious ignorance is better than chimerical fancies, which not only themselves mislead, but prevent the growth of true doctrine; that we are possessed of empirical laws as to physical life, individual conduct, and social organisation, by which to direct experiments and guide practice with more or less approximation to truth; and that, scientific conceptions and scientific methods once instituted, a body of doctrine will accumulate with a rapidly accelerating ratio. A more fundamental objection is, that after leaving physiology, we get into a region of phenomena where Will plays a leading part, and, quite apart from all consideration of theistic interference, introduces a disturbing element that baffles the previsions of science by destroying the uniformity in the connexion of the phenomena of conduct. Whatever theory, however, be held about the human will, whatever phrases be preferred to express our consciousness of its mode of operation, it is undeniable that an act of determination is uniformly preceded by a predominant desire in conformity

with that act. The question therefore really is, can the succession of our desires be reduced to uniform laws? Given the character and the circumstances of a man, is it possible to determine what desires will direct his action? The popular, or rather the metaphysical voice, denies this possibility, but, we think, more in the interest of certain other theories —such for instance as human responsibility—than because facts compel this denial. For if this determination of human actions be really impossible under the assumed conditions,—in other words, if human actions are capricious and arbitrary in any other sense than arises from the complexity and incalculable nature of the motives which determine them,—what is the meaning of education, of moral and social influences, of any legislation but what is penal, or indeed even of penal legislation? Plainly, all these agencies rest for their validity upon the commonly-believed fact that motives influence conduct; that one train of motives ever acting upon a human being of given tendencies induces conduct different from another train of motives. Religion itself, what is it but a fresh and higher presentation of motives; truths revealed to influence human conduct, which other known truths are not capable of influencing in the same direction to the same degree? It is true that nothing appears at first sight more

variable, more capricious, less subject to any uniformities of sequence, than the phenomena of human conduct; but then, it is to be remembered that the determining conditions of human conduct are infinitely various and complex. For this reason, Mr. Mill has carefully guarded against the extravagant supposition that the future acts of men and of societies can, in the highest possibilities of social science, be foreseen like the phenomena of the heavenly bodies; and has limited the utmost attainment of that science to determine that given circumstances have a tendency to alter given characters in ascertainable degrees and directions, or that under given circumstances given characters will act in a determinate manner. Nor has M. Comte carried his speculations to a more extravagant pitch than this; which seems, after all said, to be nothing more than the enunciation with scientific precision of a belief we all act upon every day of our lives, and on which most of the institutions of society—*i. e.* all which have a moral or educational aim—are founded.

Putting aside, then, these two objections, which lie, the one against the present claims, the other against the possibility, of social science; and supposing such a science not only to the extent indicated possible, not only constituted in conception and method, but so far constructed as that the tendencies

of men and of societies under given circumstances shall be rigorously demonstrated,—our inquiry is, whether such knowledge is adequate to supply the forces necessary to maintain individuals and societies in a right course of conduct. We assume the conditions known under which the human being may be trained to any given line of conduct; but how do we determine the line of conduct to be enforced on men and on societies? The phenomena of human action being, in virtue of their complexity, eminently modifiable, have we from Positivism any principle on which to found our modifying interference, any end by which to shape our education, our social organisation, our legislation? Comte bases on the past history of human evolution a brilliant generalisation of the phases of speculative opinion through which mankind has passed or must pass, and indicates the coexistent social and political phenomena which belong to each phase. In every department of speculation that has run its course, mankind has passed through three stages, or modes of viewing the phenomena whose explanation is sought,—the theologic, in which all action in the world is referred to a volition in or above the objects moved; the metaphysic, in which the action is referred to mysterious entities supposed to reside in objects moving, and which are in fact nothing but abstract conceptions

of the phenomena themselves; and finally the positive, in which no explanation is sought beyond the classification of the phenomenon along with similar phenomena, and the ascertainment of its precedent conditions. This bare statement can give not the faintest conception of the value of the generalisation—if only estimated as an hypothetical approximation to a true law—in studying universal history. But M. Comte authoritatively lays it down as demonstrated to be the leading law of human evolution, since all other social phenomena follow its phases. If we are not satisfied with his proofs,—if we object that the first links in the chain of evidence are altogether wanting, and that the hypothesis is based upon no exhaustive analysis even of the facts which history has recorded, —we are cavalierly informed that social science requires the establishment of such a law, and established therefore it is and shall be. This law of evolution being then established to M. Comte's satisfaction, and for the sake of argument to ours also, how does it supply the guiding principle we are in quest of to regulate the future course of that evolution, so far as our modifying power may extend? Here M. Comte becomes altogether obscure and contradictory. It seems sufficient to him to know the law of the phases through which belief has passed in reference to certain departments of science,

and is, in his opinion, to pass in all branches of knowledge and speculation. The other social phenomena being dependent on or at least following the changes of speculative opinion, their law is known too. But we are as far off as ever from any guide for individual conduct, or for the action of society. It may be that M. Comte thinks it superfluous, having indicated a law of human progression, to do more than hint that we are to obey it, and become positive as quickly as we may; and that this once in course of accomplishment, the social movement will proceed harmoniously in its normal course, bringing felicity, the highest attainable, to individuals and to societies. But even this very vague injunction, to make Positivism our aim and guiding principle of conduct, has after all not even the slight practical bearing which at first sight it seems to have. For we are over and over again assured by M. Comte, that the general course of human evolution is beyond human control; that only secondary modifications as to speed, and minor indirect influences, of the main movement are within our power. Indeed, the whole course of his demonstration from history shews this, inasmuch as the evolution has proceeded into the third and final stage not only without conscious effort of men so to direct it, but against their continuous effort to thwart it and turn it to another direction. If, then,

only secondary modifications and indirect fluctuations and regurgitations of the main current are within our influence to control and regulate, of what possible use can it be to inform us only of the main law of evolution, with whose course we have nothing to do but to acknowledge it and submit to it? It is just of the things that are within our power that we have need to know, in order to regulate our conduct. A man wishing to build a house must indeed obey the law of universal gravitation, but it will help him little practically to have that law enunciated with the most convincing pomp of historical proof and the most rigid mathematical precision. We are obliged to conclude, then, that Positivism in M. Comte's hands, while pretending to take upon itself the regulation of human conduct, fails to furnish a guiding principle for either individuals or societies. It sends us to sea with an admirable chart of the tides, currents, and winds; instructs us how eminently modifiable these forces are by the rudder; but declines to provide us with a compass, or to say anything about the port for which we have to steer. All that can be done in such a case is to lie on one's back and look at the stars, or exercise an empirical prudence in selecting such a course as fancy or foresight may suggest. To drop metaphor, we must still have recourse to our celestial guides, or to our

internal monitions, in our voyage along the stormy sea of life; for M. Comte provides us with no satisfactory substitute.

But morality implies not only a fixed aim, a principle of action to maintain steadiness amid the conflicts of contending motives; it equally demands ruling influences that are adequate to maintain obedience to the principle of action, persistence towards the aim. Suppose, then, society constituted on a positive basis, its principle of existence undisputed, what motives could the system present to the members of society, young and old, to compel obedience to its regulations?—of what forces would its moral police find themselves possessed? They would have the advantage to begin with of a uniform state of belief, moulding all social influences and institutions, and so by its indirect as well as direct effects tending to check that intellectual discord and uncertainty from which so much of our social and individual weakness proceeds; an enormous force, not to be easily over-estimated—liable, however, we must remember, to be rudely broken in upon by speculations of a contrary character, so long as any field remained open for such speculations: and to the young citizens of the Positive society the Unknown would still remain open, and dreams and reminiscences could scarcely fail to float in from that region,

and fall as fruitful seeds on spirits impatient—as experience tells us human spirits ever will be—of the limitations of certain knowledge. So that even for Positivism there is no guarantee against the inroads of metaphysics and mysticism. But, be that worth what it may as an argument, the direct moral force of positive teaching would lie in the demonstration of the issues of conduct on society at large and on the individuals acting,—in the strength and vivacity of the personal and general affections; of course, rewards and punishments might be as effectual as with us at present. In fact, with the exception indicated above, and that only amounts to difference of degree, the motives of Positivism are all in force now; and added to them are all those sentiments, hopes, and fears, that spring from a belief in God and a confidence of life beyond the grave. We can speak of self-interest, of love of country, of attachment to friends and relations, of the closer ties of family, and love between man and woman, of the charms of knowledge, of the influences of art, of the sympathies inspired by generous actions, as well as the Positivist. But we can speak too of a personal Being of infinite love, purity, and power, to whom we are responsible, and who, we are taught to believe, watches our course with a tender interest, for which no name is sufficiently expressive but those which

denote the dearest earthly relationships. We can speak too of a life hereafter, and are taught to believe that the formation of character is of infinite importance compared with all other issues of conduct, because character is eternal, and what is done and thought here bears fruit of weal or woe beyond the limits of time. Even these mighty moral forces are continually found insufficient to keep us up to our imperfect sense of duty, to make us ever regard that highest social law which says 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' What, then, has Positivism to offer as a corrective to selfish passions and short-sighted lust of present gratification, that can do in the place of these? We assumed vastly too much when we conceded to this system that the affections will flourish with the same vigour if the belief of man's immortality is destroyed; yet these, again, are among our strongest purifying influences—strongest to refine, strongest to free from selfishness. So it appears that this system not only fails to provide an aim for the action of man and of society, but if an aim were conceded to it, has no moral force to keep men steady, no counteracting power to the notorious selfishness and sensuality against which we have to be ever on our guard.

But if all else prospered with the positive philosophy—if demonstration compelled us to admit its

law of historical evolution—if it provided aims and motives to individual or social conduct—there remains one objection, fatal, in our opinion, to its presumptions. It professes the power to elevate human life to heights of felicity and knowledge of which we as yet only dream,—that it will bring round the golden year for which poets have tuned their most stirring songs and prophets yearned upon their watch-towers; and could it perform all its votaries promise, what would be the inevitable result? Undoubtedly that the lovelier and the richer life grew—the higher in dignity, the firmer in purpose, the fuller of grand results—the fiercer would rise the longing for immortality; the more would the men and women of the 'crowning race' shrink back appalled with horror from the thought of personal annihilation. By this contradiction the scheme stands condemned in the moral judgment. Probably, were it to become the creed of the world, it would be condemned not by such contradiction, but by belying the promises of its author, and by degrading and sensualising human life till man would care as little about death as a dog does, or rather seek it as soon as his sensual faculties were so impaired that life yielded less physical pleasure than pain. If a practical test of the positive creed be wanted, there is one ready at hand. Let any one follow to the grave the wife, the

child, the parent he has loved and lost, and seek to comfort himself by the reflection that the loved one is absorbed in the *grand être*—in the totality of organised life existing through all time in the universe. No! whatever speculative difficulties may beset and bewilder us when intellect is busy, and feeling and action suspended for a while, we shall all be glad, when bereavement and sorrow cast their shadows over our path, to take refuge in the faith of our childhood; and the words of our Burial-service, 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord,' will fall upon the ear with an assurance all the more sure from the doubts with which we have struggled, and the clouds of speculation that have hid the great moral verities for a time from our over-strained eyes.

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THE END.

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